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ABSTRACT

This publication presents five reports that represent research conducted by adult educators. "Supporting Adult Educators in Researching Their Practice" (Janelle Davis, Jean Searle) presents results of four action research projects related to developing literacies for disadvantaged groups or groups with special needs. "Towards Mutual Benefits: Integrating and Mentoring Volunteer Tutors into the Everyday Workings of Special Needs Literacy Classes" (David Horton, Marian Horton) reports a study that identified the need for an adapted program/course for these volunteers and program/course content. "Evaluation Report of the Community Literacy Voluntary Tutor Training Program for Youth Workers" (Marya McDonald) reports participants were satisfied but their approach in youth field work was to "fix" clients' short term problems, offering no longer term recognition that the young people needed to access training or programs that would improve their overall literacy/numeracy skill levels. "Preparing Students To Study by Flexible Delivery in the Certificate in Adult General Education (CAGE)" (Luaine Hawkins) reports that while the majority of learners in CAGE say they like to study by flexible delivery, they lack the self-directedness to take advantage of it, and pre-course screening for flexible learning readiness, a preparatory course that targets learning skills necessary for flexible learning, and support during CAGE are required. "Small Action Research Project on English as a Second Language (ESL) Literacy and Pre-Linguistic African Women Refugees" (Jenny Trevino, Jennifer Davids) finds that a language experience approach should underpin the teaching strategies used; the teacher should focus on childhood, familial, cultural, or ceremonial experiences; and sharing these memories could help women's traditional centrality in the family. (Most papers contain references.) (YLB)

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Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium

ALNARC

Seeding literacy: Adult educators research their practice

Janelle Davis
Jean Searle

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Queensland Centre of ALNARC
School of Vocational, Technology and Arts Education
Griffith University

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Editor's notes
The formats, styles and bibliographic conventions, while internally consistent, represent the variety of conventions presented by the research teams.

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1 Supporting adult educators in researching their practice

Janelle Davis and Jean Searle

Background

The Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium (ALNARC) was recently established with ANTA funding through DETYA. ALNARC has a Centre in each state and a national office based at Victoria University. One of the focuses of the Queensland Centre of this consortium, situated at Griffith University, is to add to the knowledge base of literacy needs for disadvantaged groups or groups with special needs.

In 1999, the Queensland Centre was funded to implement two research projects developed by the state directors in collaboration with ANTA and DETYA officers as well as industry representatives. The brief of Project #1 was to examine the effects of the inclusion of literacy and numeracy in industry standards in Training Packages on quality of learning and work outcomes. The brief of Project #2 was to investigate the effectiveness and responsivity of literacy and numeracy provision for groups with identified special needs or circumstances. In actioning this project, the Queensland Centre decided to follow the precedent set by the former Queensland Adult Literacy Research Network Node, funded by Language Australia, and offer four small-action research grants to practitioner-researchers in Queensland.

The diversity of the projects has enabled the Queensland Centre to support a number of different local interests and initiatives and thus enhance opportunities to appreciate more fully the literacy and numeracy needs of the adult population. Two of the main outcomes derived from the small action research projects have included a list of strategies that, if implemented, should result in a more responsive and effective tutor training program which specifically meets the literacy and numeracy needs of disadvantaged young people, and further development of the link between theory and best practice for using volunteer tutors in the classroom to assist special needs literacy learners. Notable outcomes stemming from the third research project included recommended strategies for better preparing students to study Certificate in Adult General Education (CAGE) by flexible delivery. Finally, the fourth project has led to the formulation of more effective learning programs to meet the literacy and learning needs of people non-literate in their first language.

The findings of these small action research projects have been disseminated in a range of publications such as the newsletter of the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy '*Write On*', the Queensland Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy (QAELLN) Council regional newsletters and on-line sources. In addition, the practitioner-researchers from each project were invited

to present their findings at the national ALNARC forum held in Melbourne and in smaller forums in Queensland. The success of these projects is testimony to the achievement of the Queensland Centre in developing and maintaining a viable research culture in the field of adult literacy and numeracy.

Why practitioner based research?

We would argue that there are three important outcomes when encouraging and supporting practitioner based research. Firstly, there is an improvement in teaching and learning through engaging in reflexive inquiry. Secondly, such support enables practitioner-researchers to respond to local needs and issues. Thirdly, we believe that it is important to develop and maintain a research culture within adult literacy and numeracy.

The Queensland Centre of ALNARC has continued the history of collaborative research emanating from the days of the former National Language and Literacy Institute of Australia research network node. Two main strategies have been adopted in order to bring research and practice closer together. The first strategy was to commission a series of 'Research into Practice' booklets. A number of distinguished researchers were invited to write about their particular research interests and discuss implications for practice. This series has proved most popular as the authors strive to 'engage' practitioners in the excitement and value of research. The second strategy was to actively encourage practitioners to engage in research through the provision of small research grants and researcher mentoring. Underpinning these strategies was our strong belief in the importance of collaborative partnerships between practitioners and researchers in adult literacy and numeracy, not only because such research is fundamental to the improvement of teaching and learning, but also because we recognised a need to develop a research culture within the field.

The funding for educational research has become increasingly competitive. Not only does the adult literacy and numeracy field have to compete with the broader education and vocational education and training sectors for research funding, but such funding is highly contested by major research centres and well credentialed individual researchers. It is difficult for researchers coming from the relatively new field of adult literacy and numeracy, who may not have a proven track record in research, to demonstrate their expertise and compete. Further, practitioner research is often critiqued as being under-theorised or methodologically unsound. So, one of the reasons for developing a research culture is to break down what has been referred to as a 'silo' mentality in relation to research. That is, rather than research being seen as the province of the 'academic' researcher, quite separate from the 'grassroots' practitioner, we would favour the concept of 'working together/researching together' - being inclusive of different voices and different approaches.

Another issue associated with research funding relates to 'what' research is funded. Increasingly, the providers of research grants state explicitly in the guidelines or implicitly in the selection process, what is to

be investigated. This imposition on researchers constrains innovative projects and often works against the systematic investigation of local issues. There is also a tendency to lock researchers into discipline areas rather than work across disciplines and sectors. So, in encouraging practitioners to investigate the effectiveness and responsivity of literacy and numeracy provision for groups with identified special needs or circumstances, we were seeking to broaden the contexts of research from the classroom to the community, and to consider the diverse needs of rural and isolated students, of indigenous and migrant peoples, or people with disabilities, in relation to literacy learning.

In order to do this, it was seen to be important to encourage practitioners to explore and reflect on their practice, in their own contexts, through engagement in action research and reflexive inquiry. At the same time, the practitioner-researchers were supported through workshops and individual mentoring. The following sections indicate how this process was implemented.

The Selection of Successful Project Applications

At the initial meeting of the advisory committee of the Queensland Centre of ALNARC it was decided to offer four small action research grants related to the topic of 'Developing Literacies for Disadvantaged Groups or Groups with Special Needs'. Successful collaborative teams of practitioners and researchers were to receive up to $2000 to help facilitate this research.

In order to reach a broad practitioner audience, an advertisement offering interested persons an opportunity to submit a proposal for an action research grant was placed in the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy's newsletter, *Write On*. Additionally, information was disseminated widely through established networks (for example, the TAFE Queensland Language and Literacy Services and the Queensland Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Council networks). Former recipients of grants were also invited to submit applications. These proposals were to include a description of the logistics of the project, expected outcomes, and a support statement from relevant bodies to be involved in the research. Projects were to be of four months duration.

A total of nine proposals were received. The quality of these proposals was rated by members of the Queensland Centre of ALNARC Advisory Committee according to a set of criteria that had been developed and agreed upon. Membership of the Advisory Committee was made up of representatives from the following councils: the Queensland Adult English Language, Literacy and Numeracy Council, the Queensland Council for Adult Literacy, the Queensland Industry Training Council, the Queensland Council of Unions and the Queensland Council of Social Services as well as the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit, Education Queensland. Industry

trainers were also represented on the committee. The foci of the successful applicants were as follows:

- to document the literacy and learning needs of women from an African background, and identify appropriate literacy learning approaches that are responsive to their needs;
- to integrate and support/mentor volunteer tutors into the everyday workings of special needs literacy classes;
- to improve the literacy skills of adult learners who wish to enrol in the Certificate of Adult General Education;
- to trial literacy tutor training and assessment materials developed for use with youth workers.

A Memorandum of Agreement was drafted and sent to the recipients. Upon execution of this document researchers received an initial payment of $1,500 for the project. The final payment of $500 was paid upon receipt of a satisfactory project report.

Orientation

To support the practitioner-researchers, a research workshop was held shortly after the successful grant recipients were notified. The workshop provided an opportunity to discuss action research methodology and to clarify a number of administrative issues about the projects. Advisory Committee members provided valuable input to these discussions. This workshop was followed by on-site visits to metropolitan projects by the Liaison Officer, Janelle Davis. The visits ensured that the researchers were clear on what they were investigating and that they were proposing suitable procedures and an appropriate time frame for undertaking the inquiry. They also received guidance about the required style and presentation of the final report. In order to provide similar assistance to Luaine Hawkins, who was based at the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE in Cairns, a teleconference link and follow-up phone calls between the Liaison Officer and researcher were implemented.

Further assistance was provided in the form of an orientation package which was received by all researchers and contained the following information:

- information about the guidance that was available from the Queensland Centre of ALNARC;
- a proforma for reporting on progress on the small action research project;
- a timeline outlining the different phases of the study and the weeks remaining until submission;
- a reminder about the requirements for the final report presentation;
- an expenditure form designed to keep a running record of expenses for acquittal purposes.

Feedback from the researchers confirmed the value of this package as it oriented them to the expectations of the Centre in relation to the project.

Action Research Models – Orientation Workshop

In addition to the orientation package, an orientation workshop sought to provide the practitioner-researchers with a framework of different approaches and models of research methodologies which could be used effectively in the field of literacy and numeracy research. Specifically, the nuts and bolts of identifying a research problem and developing a literature review were explained. In addition, the interest and focus of the workshop was with familiarising practitioner-researchers with approaches to action research which integrate and reflection. The content was founded on the work of Bob Dick (1999) which describes action research as a family of research methodologies which pursue action and understanding at the same time. Most models recommended to the researchers shared a cyclical or spiral process which alternated between action and critical reflection, and in the later cycles, followed a process of refinement of data and interpretation in the light of the understanding gleaned from the earlier cycles (Lewin, 1947; Shani & Bushe, 1987; Shepard, 1960). It was reinforced that frequent critical reflection is a central part of action research. Further, action research was described as being an emergent process in which there is increased collaboration between all those involved in the inquiry project. The workshop helped the researchers to clarify the value of action research methods, to reinforce their ability to develop skills in reflective practice and contribute to the wider understanding of the place of inquiry in the development of professional practice in a way in which most other paradigms cannot.

Continued Mentoring

An integral component of the mentoring process also involved provision of on-going assistance to researchers during the project term. This was achieved by encouraging researchers to call, email or fax with any queries arising in relation to the project. Researchers were also asked to avail themselves of a member of the Centre staff to provide assistance or information in relation to any emergent issues.

A third phase of the guidance entailed participants attending a workshop midway through the term of the projects. All researchers and some Advisory Committee members attended this workshop. Luaine Hawkins participated via a teleconference link. Researchers were asked to provide a brief progress report (following the proforma) in order to clarify any issues or concerns that pertained to their project. This provoked a lively discussion among the practitioners/researchers and mentors. Not only did this workshop engender constructive feedback for the researchers, it also provided an opportunity for researcher networking. Subsequently, the progress reports formed the basis of interim reports to the Queensland Centre of ALNARC Advisory Committee and to DETYA.

Due to the success of this workshop it was deemed appropriate to hold a follow-up session towards the end of the projects. The objective of this meeting was to remind researchers of the submission date for project reports, to discuss the format of the final report and to inform researchers that they could forward a draft copy of the report to Centre staff for comments and suggestions. The provision of this support was to ensure the quality and coherence of the research in relation to the project brief 'Developing Literacies for Disadvantaged Groups or Groups with Special Needs'.

Following are brief summaries of each of the four projects.

Description of Projects

1. Integrating and supporting/mentoring volunteer tutors into the everyday workings of special needs literacy classes.

This project was conducted by Marion Horton and David Horton, Southbank Institute of TAFE.

Aim

To develop and evaluate a best practice model of mentoring those tutors who work on-site with disability groups and who cannot or do not access a more formal voluntary tutoring course.

Description

Practice alerted the researchers to the fact that certain volunteers would not enrol in a formal TAFE certificate in volunteer tutoring, due to perceptions of examination/assessment. Additionally, those who had been through the formal volunteer tutor training course were not necessarily prepared for the kinds of learning approaches, their purposes and the kinds of activities and tasks used with multi-level, special needs, adult literacy learners.

The research project was designed to achieve a model of best practice, which aimed to assist volunteers to learn approaches to support special needs learners on site, rather than enrolling in a formal Certificate of Volunteer Tutoring. By following this model, a more informal and workable course content/program should result for volunteers of special needs/literacy learners within local settings.

Methodology

- reflexivity – diaries kept by participant teachers;
- collaboration with other teachers and academics;
- interviews with volunteers.

Outcomes

- a strengthened link between theory and best practice for training volunteer tutors, to assist special needs literacy learners for the benefit of both parties;
- an improved quality of learning through the volunteer experience;
- a simple and workable framework of an adapted program/course for volunteers of special/needs/literacy learners within local settings;
- documentation of enhanced performance within the community of tutors and learners;
- documentation of the changing profile of volunteer tutors.

Recommendations

- there is a need for an adapted program/course for volunteers of special needs/literacy learners in local settings;
- this training course would need to be much *shorter in intensity*, but over a longer duration of time as necessary, to provide ongoing support and feedback to volunteer tutors within the classroom environment;
- statements of attainment (or attendance) could be given for individual modules, which could be flexibly grouped under a category of 'Tutoring Special Needs Students';
- feedback to tutors on their progress needs to be of an informal nature, although it should be structured into a co-ordinating teacher's schedule. Alternatively, teacher release time could be scheduled for feedback to a small volunteer tutor group, made possible through volunteers being enrolled in an individual learning program as students of a 'tutoring course/package';
- the tutor training package should contain a basic computer module involving elementary word processing.

2. Voluntary Tutor Training Program for Youth Workers

This project was conducted by Marya McDonald, Youth Sector Training Council.

Aims

To conduct an evaluation of the materials and the outcomes of a tutor training program for youth workers; and

To moderate the tutor training program and materials in order to increase the tutoring skills of the youth workers to enable them to facilitate the literacy and numeracy skills of their young clients more effectively.

Description

Substantial evidence was gathered over time from regional and urban inquiries by the Youth Sector Training Council of Queensland (YSTC) which suggested that youth workers were being asked by young people to provide them with literacy support. This prompted the view that more thorough research of field workers was required to examine the possible benefits of a voluntary tutor program being delivered by an expert literacy teacher in close partnership with youth sector workers.

As a result of the demonstrated need in the field, YSTC received funding from the Department of Employment Training and Industrial Relations to provide customised literacy/numeracy tutor training for community based workers in order to broaden and enhance their existing skills to be able to better accommodate the most appropriate literacy support for young people. The training was delivered in four locations namely Noosa, Rockhampton, Mackay and Brisbane.

Further funding was provided by the Queensland Centre of ALNARC to enable YSTC to conduct research on the effectiveness of the training materials and information given to the participants and the value of the program in assisting them in their interactions with clients. It was envisaged that such an evaluation would enable the tutor training program and materials to be moderated in order to better accommodate the most appropriate support for young people.

Methodology

- participants were required to complete assessment and evaluation questionnaires;
- interviews with participating teachers.

Outcomes

- a need to moderate the process of assessment and assessment instruments to reflect a more supportive time frame in line with the time commitments of professional field workers;
- a more responsive and effective tutor training program which specifically meets the literacy and numeracy needs of disadvantaged young people.

Recommendations

- alternative methods of self assessment need to be investigated and developed;
- an alteration of the time frame associated with the assessment materials of the tutor training program.

3. Preparing low literacy learners to study by flexible delivery in the CAGE.

This project was conducted by Luaine Hawkins, Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE.

Aim

To evaluate the effectiveness of the CAGE bridging course in preparing students to study by flexible delivery; and

To document the factors which influence students' ability to adapt to flexible delivery including some of the strategies students use that demonstrate their readiness to study by flexible delivery.

Description

The Certificate in Adult General Education (CAGE) was developed to provide adult learners with the opportunity to study by flexible delivery for an award which is recognised as the equivalent to a Year 10 Certificate. CAGE has been implemented at the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE for the past two years, and learners enrol to undertake some or all of the five subjects over 18 week semesters.

Although learners are interviewed on application to study CAGE, the attrition rate and failure to successfully complete coursework are high. In response to this, in Semester 1, 1999, a CAGE Bridging Course was developed to enable the learners to develop their skills for study by flexible delivery.

Funding from the Queensland Centre of ALNARC allowed the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of the CAGE Bridging course in preparing students for study by flexible delivery. In particular the study hoped to highlight the factors which influence students' ability to adapt to flexible delivery and also document the strategies which students use to demonstrate their readiness to improve self directed learning skills and cope with study in this mode.

Methodology

- individual interviews with students enrolled in CAGE;
- reflective diaries of participating teachers;
- questionnaire distributed to students.

Outcomes

- distance students did not complete preparatory work due to work commitments or isolation;
- due to location, students' progress was hindered by a lack of resources and understanding of programs;
- Newstart (500 hours) students were more prepared with literacy and learning skills and in comparison to the remote students experienced fewer barriers to learning.

Recommendations

- provision of effective pre-course screening such as a comprehensive questionnaire which evaluates the learners weaknesses and strengths in the area of self-directness;
- provision of a preparatory course which specifically targets the learning skills necessary for flexible delivery;
- Bridging course needs to include a very strong focus on interpersonal and communication skills.

4. ESL Literacy and Pre-Literate African Women Refugees

This project was conducted by Jenny Trevino and Jennifer Davids, Southbank Institute of TAFE.

Aim

To explore the needs and special circumstances of pre-literate NESB women, particularly women from the Horn of Africa, in reference to English language learning.

Description

The researchers' work in the field alerted them to the fact that the language needs of these women were not being met, for a variety of reasons including, the institutionalised nature of most learning centres; curriculum inadequacies; lack of childcare provision and transport problems.

The research project aimed to gather information through liaison with community based organisations such as church organisations, the Red Cross and the Queensland Program for Assistance to the Survivors of Torture and Trauma, which have worked with the women in order to make recommendations regarding the most effective and appropriate way of delivering literacy programs to this target group.

Methodology

Liaison with a range of community organisations to:

- plan an integrated approach to assisting these women;
- develop a network of agencies.

Outcomes

- realisation that little is known about this cultural group;
- the recognition that to facilitate the provision of an effective literacy program there is a need to discard many of the western assumptions about education and learning.

Recommendations

- a need to select an informal and familiar community setting for literacy classes;
- course content should include language in context which answers to the immediate settlement needs of the target group;
- an all female ESL literacy group would foster more direct and informal communication with the women themselves;
- childcare needs could be met by employing voluntary students from Childcare Certificate and Diploma courses and also setting up a volunteer playgroup staffed by the women themselves;
- lobbying the government to provide free childcare to NESB families in need of language, literacy and numeracy training.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- division of the allocated funds to sponsor four small projects allowed the Queensland ALNARC to support a number of different local interests and initiatives and contribute to the knowledge base of literacy needs for a wider group with special needs;
- involvement of the Queensland ALNARC Advisory Committee in the selection of practitioner-researcher projects and the research process allowed community and other key stakeholders to make a valuable contribution to the direction of these research activities;
- the orientation package that was developed, the visits by the Liaison Officer to the practitioner-researchers involved in the three metropolitan studies and follow-up phone calls were successful in ensuring researchers were clear on the expectations of the Centre in relation to the project;
- workshops were useful in disseminating information pertaining to the projects and enabled cross fertilisation among the different researchers and mentors to occur.

Recommendation 1:

To extend the timeline given between dissemination of information pertaining to small grants and proposal submission date.

Recommendation 2:

To repeat the process of dividing payment for the project. Withholding a final payment provides a means to ensure the quality and receipt of the final report.

Recommendation 3:

To investigate the possibility of providing a video-conference for researchers in distant areas, in order to better address the 'tyranny of distance'.

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2 Towards mutual benefits: Integrating and mentoring volunteer tutors into the everyday workings of special needs literacy classes

David Horton and Marian Horton

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Introduction

In August 1999 funding was received for small scale action research in the area of volunteer tutoring for special needs groups. These learner groups were enrolled at a TAFE Institute within Brisbane. In our previous research findings (Horton and Horton, in press) we recommended that volunteer tutors be integrated into the everyday workings of classes containing special needs and ESOL learners. While it has long been recognised that learners and teachers alike bring years of life experience and cultural knowledge to the instructional setting (McGroaty, 1993), this also applied to volunteer tutors.

As practitioners, we had experienced that certain volunteers would not enrol in a formal TAFE Certificate in volunteer tutoring. This was due to perceptions of examinations or assessment, and particularly if this was remote from their everyday experience in class. Others preferred not to take on the responsibilities of home tutoring.

Additionally, those who had been through the formal volunteer tutor training course were not necessarily prepared for the kinds of learning approaches, their purposes and the kinds of activities and tasks used with *special needs* literacy (and ESOL/literacy) adult learners.

This research was an attempt to address this need at a practical level of literacy provision and to highlight areas of need concerning adapted kinds of training for volunteer tutors in adult classes. We initiated the research by asking the following questions:

- can we achieve a model of best practice, which can make the best use of time and interests in assisting volunteers to learn approaches to support special needs learners?
- can this be an effective and productive partnership with benefits for all?
- can volunteer tutoring enhance vocational goals?

Considering issues of risk management, the above has occurred within the context of the classroom and adult learning environment. This has enabled a process of mentoring of volunteers on-site and their participation in on-going feedback.

This research should assist in addressing an immediate need experienced by the teacher-researchers as well as other teachers and special needs learners. Teachers working off-site at locations within the community had reported difficulty in recruiting volunteers. In addition, it had been difficult to attract those who would have the patience to work with disability groups, and be positive role models for the learners themselves.

Background Information

> *Volunteer service is an important site of lifelong learning opportunities that benefits both individuals and society.*
>
> (Kerka, 1998, p.4).

Elsdon (1995) and Portelli (1997) seem to consider that volunteer tutors are motivated not by explicit formal learning, but by personal growth changes, such as self-empowerment, broadening of social networks, organisational skills and responsibility. Norsman (1997) found that transformative learning could occur in an atmosphere which encouraged volunteer participants to reflect, think critically and act on behalf of their organisation.

Geber (1991) identified a change in the profile of volunteer tutors, to include a broader section of society. Rather than a majority of 'full-time homemakers', the profile was seen to include senior citizens, students, full-time professionals and people with disabilities. Others also noted that the traditional source of school volunteers (as mothers) was shrinking as they sought jobs outside the home and that there was a wealth of experience and expertise in their communities' senior populations (Freedman, 1994).

In previous teaching of special needs/ESOL literacy learners, we have avoided deficit thinking by highlighting and valuing differences in learners (Black and Thorp, 1997), and this valuing has been extended to volunteer tutors, as an integral part of a 'community of learners'. Informed by a critical literacies and a socio-cultural perspective to learning, the teacher also learns from everyone within the group, as a matter of principle.

Freebody (1997) noted that there are "few studies of everyday literacy practices available anywhere in the world" (p.15). Certainly, we found no research study which utilised as volunteer tutors, the resource available through other special needs adult learners. This study has been framed by beliefs in the social practices of reading and writing, and the existence of dominant groups and forms of literacies over more marginalised groups and forms (Street, 1995). It has been an attempt to use some ethnographic approaches, within the study

focus, to reveal aspects of everyday literacy practices for these groups (Heath and McLaughlin, 1994).

In this social research, conducted within a post-structuralist frame, reflexivity was "a resource rather than a source of bias" to be eliminated (Usher, 1996, p.38). However, we were not confessional for its sake alone, as we considered that this could undermine the value of reflectivity, by over-emphasising bias. Whilst there is understanding that the research act itself is embodied within a social world, which impacts on the participants, according to Troyna (1994, p.9), "reflexively locating (oneself) in (ones) work" does not necessarily strengthen the methodology. Our interpretation is that – whilst accepting the subjectivity of research, by foregrounding our values and biases, and being reflexive as a monitor of the process – 'over-indulgence' could lead to insularity and an unnecessary self-censorship.

Method

This research has been inclusive of a variety of participants, including the following: teachers, students, student volunteer tutors and other stakeholders – such as support workers and case managers. Rapport and trust had already been built with participants, prior to commencing the study.

ASIDE 1 Marian's thoughts, 30 July 1999:

Although volunteer tutors will be utilised within the classroom (through direction of the teacher) we will also be aiming for specific benefits for them. Having volunteers does not necessarily make my job easier – as it adds another layer of complication to my teaching. Previously, I have often spent as much time outside the classroom working with volunteers after/before class, as within the classroom sessions themselves. This was when volunteers were eager, and requested to learn tutoring strategies for literacy/special needs (which they may have not covered under a formal Certificate of Volunteer Tutoring Course, as delivered at that time). Rather than making a job 'easier' it brings a 'peace a mind' to know that I'm trying to accommodate a wide range of student needs, and this brings satisfaction in itself. Also I see not only the tutors, but the volunteers, learning new skills, getting a lot out of coming and enjoying themselves. You can in a sense 'reality test' with volunteers regarding appropriateness of delivery, such as naturalness of language, as many are very wise (and often street-wise) and we all have our story to tell.

Three classes were selected in three different locations, from a potential pool of four classes, two of whom were familiar to both participant-researchers. Due to increased teaching commitments elsewhere the fourth class was omitted from the study, as access could no longer be sustained. The other three classes remained accessible through their continued enrolment in TAFE vocational and literacy courses. One

class was located on the institute's main campus. The other two were located off-site. Permission was sought and given from management for us to engage in this work.

The on-campus course was conducted in a dedicated computer room, in a modern, air-conditioned building with large windows and good lighting. There were 19 computers in the room, with ample space between the aisles for students to rove and interact. One student was in a wheelchair and another in a motorized scooter. The range of disabilities within the group of 15 learners was wide: one was profoundly deaf (attended with his support worker), five were visually impaired with two being blind, two had mild intellectual impairment with another being moderate (the latter attended with her carer). The remainder had stabilised psychiatric disabilities. Ages ranged from 19 through to 52 years. Five volunteer tutors were involved in this site, three of whom worked in a paid capacity towards the end of the study.

The two off-campus locations contrasted greatly with the on-site course. One was located in a rural remote area, in a community house, with comfortable and relaxed surroundings. It had a well-equipped kitchen, a large room for training, but with one computer and printer for the students. The teacher brought along at least one additional laptop computer for students to use in class time. There were eight disabled students, whose disabilities ranged from mild to moderate. Intellectual disability was the common feature, with one high functioning youth with a history of substance abuse, and another who needed a walking frame. Ages ranged from 19 to 35 years. One support worker from the organisation was timetabled to assist with the students. Three volunteer tutors were involved at this site over the course of the study.

The third location was in an outer suburb of Brisbane, in a separate hall adjoining a community centre. It had a kitchenette and large room, but no computer, other than those provided by the teacher. To its advantage, it was located very close to a shopping complex which facilitated activities focussed on accessing the community. The common disability was intellectual, but again the range was wide, from low support (mildly impaired) to high support moderate disability. Ages ranged from 18 to 32 with approximately eight to nine learners together at one time. Three volunteer tutors were involved at this site. The age of the volunteer tutors ranged from 23 to 77 at this site.

ASIDE 2 David's thoughts, 30 July 1999:

Reflecting back to when I was a volunteer tutor myself – in 1995 – I seemed to think at the time that volunteers had a definite role which was distinct from that of the teacher. Their level of interpersonal communication could be 'an antidote' to what may sometimes be perceived by the learner as the didactic style of the teacher. I got an impression that they might talk to me, because I was in a less formal relationship with them. How I was utilised in the class would depend on to what extent the teacher wanted to integrate me with the activities and the broader plan of the class. If they just wanted me to assist with tasks, then

> *that was fine. At the time I was eager to learn all I could about strategies. However, if a teacher wanted to get genuine feedback on the progress of individual students or indeed how well an activity was going with the students, I found this the most valuable for me and my learning. This obviously depended on the personality of the teacher.*

In retrospect, this is how I have endeavoured to use tutors myself, as a teacher, because tutors will often be a valuable resource for feedback and making classes more authentic. Even paid tutors at TAFE (although not within the parameters of this study) would often appreciate being treated as part of a team in being asked for their input. I suppose its all about making the best possible learning environment, not just keeping the tutors or the teachers happy.

The students, volunteers and participants were fully briefed on their role in this research. All participants' names are pseudonyms, with the exception of the two teachers. Confidentiality was assured and this trust was developed over time with the participants, including prior to the commencement of the formal study. For example, the maximum time volunteers had been informally working with the teacher at off-site community centre locations was two days per week over one year (approximately 480–500 hours); the minimum time was 132 hours (over 5 months). The teacher working at the institute's main campus had known the volunteer tutors for a minimum of 225 contact hours per tutor (over one year of teaching – they had at first been students in his class). This excluded contact time over lunch breaks and morning tea. This same teacher's contact with the students in the study was a minimum of 75 hours per student, again excluding informal contact.

All volunteer tutors at the main campus had completed a previous introductory course in either office skills or basic computing, or both. Two volunteer tutors who commenced paid employment towards the end of the study, had completed teaching qualifications. One also commenced supply teaching in schools in addition to this. Whilst not necessarily wishing to stay with teaching or tutoring, the informal mentoring process helped them to rehabilitate. However, these were the exception to the rule, concerning their formal vocational qualifications.

The background of the volunteers on the off-site courses varied. One had left school at grade 9 to have a family. Her re-entry into the workforce followed divorce and ill-health. She was from a Non-English Speaking Background, but she had very high proficiency in language and literacy. She had also run her own catering business. The elderly retired man had a technical background and his wife had worked in semi-skilled occupations. Other volunteer tutors had completed schooling to grade 12, prior to raising families and re-entering the workforce as unqualified support workers.

Teacher-researchers and participants collaborated, thus promoting an equivalence of power in the relationship. Participants were well informed of what they had to do and the likely consequences through ongoing consultation and collaboration. They were given the choice as to whether or not they wanted

to participate. Prior to this research, they had been informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Procedures

The first two-month phase (**August–September**) involved the following:

- the establishment of a reference group comprising the institute's Assistant Director and Business Development manager. A meeting was also held with a representative of the QLD-ALNARC group. This university body included an associate professor, lecturers and a co-ordinator;
- initially the two teacher-researchers contacted reference group members to organise implementation of the research. Participant-observation of groups occurred (Glesne and Peskin, 1992);
- we commenced the literature review relevant to socio-linguistics and ethnographic approaches to the study focus;
- the teachers kept reflective teaching journals and notes (Bailey, 1990), which were reviewed continually;
- a data collection and initial analysis stage followed. The data collected included: artifacts, such as writing samples, course/lesson content, journal entries (and taped interviews in the later stages);
- discussions involving a collaborative 'dialogic reflexivity' in interpreting data, to confirm/support research interpretations (Knobel, 1997, p.113) were then held.;
- the gathering of information also occurred through informal feedback and chat, in this stage of the research.

October–November

- we commenced focus group interviews in the setting. These were semi-structured or exploratory interviews with questionnaire schedules (see Appendix I). Active listening involving open-ended and confirmatory comments were used to further probe in the interviews – thus reducing the potential to lead from the initial questions. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed;
- a follow-up questionnaire was given to the interviewees (see Appendix III). Students were given another questionnaire (see Appendix II);
- informal chats with support workers, carers and students occurred in all settings;
- evaluation and reflection of research to date was conducted which focussed on further issues and questions which had evolved. Gradual identification of categories, as evolving from recurring themes and issues occurred. These were also consistent with theories of socio-linguistic/culture of study. We conferred with the reference group and QLD-ALNARC group according to need and to increase trustworthiness;

- we compiled a draft report to reflect multiple voices; and engaged in the evaluation and meta-reflection of the research process asking questions such as: What worked ? What didn't work? How could we have improved our methods? What would we do differently next time?
- finally we referred report extracts to participants to verify interpretations and to increase trustworthiness of the study and referred the report draft to reference group and QLD-ALNARC members for review and feedback.

Tricks of the trade

Socialising volunteers into tutoring practice involves a willingness of the teacher to share the 'tricks of the trade' and consciously shift the stance of oneself as expert. Comments from the teachers were typified by the following:

> *Every student is a potential tutor.*
> *What goes around comes around – you get so much more back.*

Being open to selecting chunks of skills useful to the immediate situation and being able to impart these in an everyday manner was imperative to maintaining volunteer interest in the programs. Volunteers were enculturated by informal learning through participation and observation of the group and specific 'chats' on tricks of the trade as requested or needed from the teacher. This then enabled them to feel that they could interact meaningfully in learning encounters. Volunteers were however enculturated into learning over time, as the class was involved in an apprenticeship with the teacher (Rogoff, 1993; Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Comments from the tutors concerning the teachers included the following:

> *...has a very human side...treats everyone as equal but the students respect that...they listen and want to learn – Sandra.*

> *Insists on doing everything hands on – is perfect – Anita.*

However, patterns emerged that tutors also wanted to know more about the teaching process and be involved in lesson planning at some level. This was after they had spent several sessions within the class:

> *Would like to do the homework for it – worked out the program before – how I can teach it, because I'm trying to assimilate in my own mind how I will do it with the clients and the same time as I'm trying to do it – May.*

However this same volunteer (a support worker) also said that she used the teacher as a role model 'did it from what I saw...just role-modelling stuff'. Other elucidating comments included:

... would like to learn about human behaviour – Annette & May.

The psychology behind teaching and its skills – Adam.

Communication – how to handle people, have patience with people and be direct when they get off the track – Bob.

Methods for teaching literacy and numeracy and concepts behind that – Annette.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data were collected and coded according to qualitative research guidelines for grounded theory research. The approach began with open-ended questions rather than hypothesis. Data were concurrently generated and examined, through use of an inductive process designed to reflect theoretical ideas and product description. This approach focussed on discovering categories and hypothesis relevant to the research focus or phenomenon. Categories, themes and initial theory were constructed directly from the data (Miles and Huberman, 1984)

Dimensions of volunteer-tutoring identified in the literature review were used as an organizing framework for presenting the data analysis. However this framework was not used to control data collection, but was used as a logical way to organize and present the data after they had been collected. We dealt only with those statements that related explicitly to the concepts. No attempt has been made to reveal all dialogue included in any grouping. Instead, representative comments are quoted to capture the essence within each category.

Volunteers learn informally by experience and observation

Not this is what you must do – you play it by ear – Clark.

I think it's good if somebody is interested to go and watch – as an onlooker.

I think you have to go and see firsthand what goes on – assimilate – then stand back and view the matter – Molly.

And also being a tutor the students ask questions that are too advanced – you have to leave it up to the teacher to answer... on the other side if (the teacher) answers that student's question, then you've learnt something yourself, if you listen – Adam.

Volunteer tutors can be motivated by personal growth changes and broadening of social networks

In the case of students with a psychiatric disability their condition had been stabilized prior to entry to the TAFE courses. A student who had previously suffered from a major psychiatric illness, reported the following

Adam: And I'm enjoying it. I like the atmosphere, I like the students too, I like the train ride to TAFE.

Anyone who is focussed on helping others is not as socially inhibited: "I felt I would help anyone I could as much as possible." (Ken) Being a volunteer for them involved more than learning content skills, as elucidated from the following extract from the focus group:

Interviewer: How has being a volunteer tutor helped you?

Adam: A worthwhile pastime. Not being idle at home on social security – giving us something worthwhile to do.

Ken: The satisfaction of helping people and then they say thank you for helping me – it makes you feel good

Jill: Helping others when I do help others... You are learning about yourself and other people at the same time...

Interviewer: I really do feel that. From the sorts of groups I've worked with – and they've all been a little different and I genuinely learn and I think any open-minded teacher will...I learn from all my students and they learn from you

Jill: That's right. You're learning about yourself and about others at the same time. It's good to be in a work environment. If you haven't been in one for a long time, well it's good to be in a work environment

Vocational goals were also enhanced by these changes and by the tutors being exposed to other group situations. Students experienced an expansion and a depth to their social relationships and a commensurate increase in self-esteem. This was revealed as "Bob" related:

Bob: Well, I enrolled in the ELC (Electronic Learning Centre) course but had difficulty coming in.

Interviewer: How has being a volunteer tutor helped you?

Bob: Because of my situation it has helped me to grow a little and change.

Interviewer: Like can you? Do you want to be more specific about that, or not?

Bob: Yes I can. I've been quite an anxious person before. Perhaps last year I wouldn't even have come here (had the interview)... I'm much improved I guess. I think this has been really helpful because it's interacting with people... you don't get any in the ELC – except for when you put the cones on the computer (to indicate you need assistance).

Bob: Yes, and like I didn't have to come in a certain day a week – like I'll go in tomorrow and tomorrow comes along (and he doesn't go).

Interviewer: Oh, like it wasn't structured.

Bob: Oh it's good for people who are really motivated and that motivation can overcome other factors.

The ELC was just a particular room Bob was coming into, not a particular person or a group. But with David's class he was coming to a particular teacher with particular students that he 'got to know' so that he could 'start to feel more comfortable'. The payback for Bob was not so much in his computer skills, but social. By coming to class he was re-entering the community and felt more confident as a result:

Bob: I've found that I'm socialising more with that group, because it's the same group on Tuesday and Friday – I'm sort of getting on with them.

Interviewer: That's great. So that's an office skills course is it?

Bob: Not that I'm not getting on with people here, but they hang around together and they go to Southbank.

Learners were encouraged to extend their boundaries and thus their social networks – that is by seeking other learning contexts. Learners may be aware of other vocational possibilities, but need to be guided and supported.

Adam: I've read them many times in the paper (the advertisements for Adult Literacy Tutor Training). It was only David (the current teacher) who got me to go along – I'm glad he did.

This desire for expansion into other communities of practice was not limited to those with a psychiatric condition. The carer of a moderately intellectually impaired student wrote:

> *I have persisted with the classes because Sally loves attending... the social commitment to Thursday classes is important for her – Anita.*

This was reinforced by other students:

> *I enjoy helping others. There is no doubt that placing yourself in the role of 'Helper' requires a different focus and therefore provides an opportunity to learn new skills and develop others. It is very much a two way street.*

These comments underscore student appreciation and need for support for the process of mentoring.

Mentoring and peer support goes beyond the immediate course content

Anita: A mutual exchange of assistance between learners is surely part of the learning process.

Bob : So hopefully I've not only helped other people, but they've helped me.

Ken: I realized that there is a fine line between helping someone and interfering... I went through a process of allowing students to take control of their own learning rather than doing everything for them.

Clark: A morning tea and discussion group could be good.

Jill: I do enjoy the 'people contact' more than the actual job of tutoring.

Assisting the teacher in staying focussed but flexible in designing learning opportunities

"*I hope the volunteers are coming*" was a regular joking statement from student Bill, as the teacher walked in the door in the mornings. Bill and others enjoyed the one-to-one and small group follow-up that was made possible by them being there. At school, the previous year, there were 'stacks of students' to one teacher. Other comments from the off-site classes were also centred around social participation with the teacher and the volunteer tutors "*...and I wanted to come down to work with Marian and Clark and Molly*".

All students considered volunteer tutors to be a very valuable addition to the classroom because their readiness and availability to assist students helps both them and the teacher. As another visually-impaired student wrote:

> *It's great to have their help...As a Visually-Impaired student it must be said that there is a real benefit having someone in the classroom who is familiar with the adaptive software and strategies which can be useful. I also feel there is a distinct advantage having a sighted person on hand to help limit some of the inevitable frustrations.*

General comments from students on the need for volunteer tutors were also simply to overcome the logistical problems. For instance, common comments were of the type:

> *The class was just too big and they (tutors) help me with some problems when the teacher is busy with another student.*
>
> *Sometimes if I get stuck they help me out.*
>
> *Help me to learn. Show me what to do.*
>
> *They help me understand what I'm reading so I like having tutors in the class.*

Valuing of difference in learners and volunteers is a principle integral to respecting adults' experience and life skills

> Clark : You listen to them and they listen to you. Not just all the one way by any means...you can't ever write anyone off – because they can – it's amazing what comes up afterwards. You undoubtedly learn from them – not just you teaching them. They teach you to be kind and patient because they're kind and patient.
>
> Molly: It's broadened my mind...It does make you feel different from before – quite humble – you think you have all the troubles in the world and you haven't.

Some students may have had many lifestyle skills which were not relevant in the immediate learning environment (such as in the computer group):

> *I consider that I could be of assistance to other students on a limited basis. This situation would be enhanced as my knowledge increases – Joan.*
>
> *I could help with very very basic computer skills – Jenny.*
>
> *I don't have enough skills yet – Tom.*

Volunteers may have a desire to learn to satisfy their own goals

> Adam: Volunteer tutoring has...improved my own skills and made me feel competent as a worker.

The following comments also indicate that volunteers were often looking beyond the immediate, towards a learner pathway and a vocational direction:

> Ken: Yes, I would greatly appreciate a formal course of study in Jaws, Zoomtext and Open Book Unbound (computer software programs specifically for the visually impaired)...A course that runs in conjunction with the Office Skills course (TAFE course designed for disability).

> Adam: If I hadn't done the office skills in computing to start off with, I wouldn't have been able to be a tutor for the computer class.

Vocational Goals and Pay-offs

Previous students have developed an interest in continuing to upgrade their skills to take on the role of volunteer tutors. In several cases this has resulted in paid employment. Three have gained employment as TAFE tutors, supporting the teacher of special needs classes, and another as a support worker with a community organisation (involved in one-to-one follow-up tutoring). For two others, volunteering in class with ongoing feedback and mentoring from the teacher has acted as a stepping stone to their enrolment in a certificate of volunteer tutoring, with another TAFE organisation. This would not have occurred without the process of mentoring, as the volunteer tutor did not consider that she would have coped with a formal course at that time, nor how to go about enrolling. She was assisted to enrol at another TAFE institute, close to her residence, for her convenience. This is an example of how there has been no 'pay off' for the teacher's institute; rather than promoting 'lifelong learning' within a given training framework (in this case, the National Training Framework).

Discussion

The study has highlighted suggestions of innovative ways in which to use volunteer tutors – such as utilising other special needs students. These have included students with low support needs but who may have a Physical or Psychiatric disability. As previously stated, in the case of students with a psychiatric disability their condition had been stabilized prior to entry to the TAFE courses.

It may have also revealed a change in the types of tasks assigned to volunteers, and the hours and places in which tasks are done (for instance, including off-site and on-line). Certain tutoring courses were written and registered before the wider proliferation of new computer technologies. The data

analysis identified computer literacies as necessary and motivational, both from the tutors' and teachers' observations involving the learners and themselves. This is also supported from recent training literature:

> *The shift from print to digital electronics calls for new views of literacy and new approaches to literacy pedagogy. Conventional views of literacy based on text – especially, the model of the literary* ***text*** *– are no longer adequate.*
>
> (DEETYA, 1997, p.17).

From the data analysis, two distinct groups have emerged:

(i) Those for whom a tutor program would involve a quite informal and more mentored ongoing support, although with specific access to course content. These would include those who are re-entering the workforce after a long break; and

(ii) Those for whom an adapted training/volunteer tutoring course would be of additional professional interest to assist in their roles as support workers to their disabled clients. It was helpful for "*dealing with them on other shifts – not just on the personal level of 'what are we going to do today'?; but on the intellectual level – the other side*". Although this is not required of them, the response from one regional setting in particular, has strongly indicated interest in following through with tutoring on a 1:1 basis.

This second group was already working part-time, but was interested in earning extra money through gaining increased work, rather than volunteering. Therefore, the existing *Certificate III in Volunteer Tutoring* was considered by them to be impractical for their needs. It involves ten weeks of half day face-to-face contact time, in addition to being expected to commit to the volunteer program for a six month period (tutor either one-to-one or in a classroom group connected with the program). A further consideration was that the course would need to be recognised in the workplace if it was going to involve a substantial period of time.

Both groups desired some kind of a feedback session, in an informal context:

> *I would enjoy a tutor support meeting, on a regular basis (with the teacher from time to time) – Jill.*

When the researchers asked the volunteers to suggest topics and ideas for further training, stating "we want to try to get it from the people who have gone through that process themselves" common patterns involved the following:

A semi-formal information session for tutors covering : a knowledge of lesson content, an idea of the student's abilities and special needs they may have (including Jill, Annette and May).

... exposure first, then withdrawal. Theory must be meaningful and relate to a person (we already know) – Annette & May.

This semi-formal, responsive approach to each teaching context was the mode preferred:

Very individual for each client. Can't lay down any law... not a general assumption. If people are interested they would quickly learn what to do – co-operate in what to do – Molly & Clark.

I'd like to know why Elle only writes in capitals – why Sandra can grab a concept but not a method – Annette.

Distance and cost of travelling to the training location was also involved for both off-campus locations. The younger volunteer tutors were either underemployed or unemployed. Two elderly volunteer tutors, who had participated for one year, considered that the sites where the Certificate Course in Volunteer Tutoring were held, were too far away and too complicated to get there. They suggested:

Elderly people don't always like driving in the city... have to bend a bit... it would mean you loose a full day every time you have a meeting – unfortunately, people have to make it easier.

Conclusion

The study has identified the need for an adapted program or course for volunteers of special needs/literacy learners in local settings. The actual development of an accredited course or training package was beyond the scope of this research. The study was concerned with a process of exploring general categories for such a course, once this emerged as a need and was reinforced from the patterns observed in the data.

Attempting to write this from existing and formalised standards, without have done this grounded study, may have rendered such work obsolete for 'special needs'. More significantly, this sort of formalisation may suppress participation and vocational outcomes for such groups.

A simple and workable framework provided through a short, very flexible course or training package, could be developed around a couple of existing modules (such as one from the *Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training*, previously known as 'Train the Trainer' and an existing volunteer literacy certificate). Perhaps a kind of 'Support-a-Reader' course, such as that of

the 'down-to-earth' approach as used with parents in schools (involving one morning session), could be considered to supplement this. The volunteer tutors were interested in being able to readily apply some strategies.

Furthermore, this training course would need to be much *shorter in intensity*, but over a longer duration of time as necessary, to provide ongoing support and feedback to volunteer tutors within the classroom environment. Although this would be of a more informal nature concerning assessment, it could be based around core units, but have some electives of existing accredited modules to suit individual disability groups and situations. For instance, for intellectual disability, a module in 'Training for Independence' could be selected from the *Certificate III in Disability Studies (TAFE QLD)*. Fundamentally, statements of attainment (or attendance) could be given for individual modules, which could be flexibly grouped under a category of '*Special Needs Tutoring*'.

These volunteers would be much needed, but could not attend an already existing training or tutoring course, for a variety of reasons, as previously identified. Perhaps feedback of an informal nature – after a morning tea 'volunteer support group' – could be structured into a co-ordinating teacher's schedule, teacher release time scheduled for feedback to a small volunteer tutor group, made possible through them being enrolled in an *Individual Learning Program (ILP)*, as students of a 'tutoring course/package'. This could help with the logistics of the situation for all three parties: support teachers, volunteer-tutors and students – the latter benefiting from the tutors feeling more skilled, more quickly. The philosophy of one's teaching program and delivery may be inclusive of volunteers, yet the task of explaining the focus of the program and teaching approaches specific to the area can become unmanageable on a daily basis, when this involves several tutors across different programs (see also Horton and Horton, 1999).

It is suggested that a training package also contains a basic computer module involving elementary word processing (such as a NOS module from an electronic learning centre – although with some face-to-face provision). More specific software requirements were involved with visually impaired students – but these could not be prescriptive to a general special needs tutoring/training package. Computers were also suggested for all three sites by volunteers. Those with more restrictive physical impairments were seen to be 'able to type' even if they couldn't write with pencil and paper. Volunteers desired to learn more computing skills from being exposed to learners, but the degree of skill required varied with each context:

> *It annoyed me that I didn't have knowledge of computers – would have liked to know basic computing – how to find a program or file, switch on and off, etc – Molly.*

> *It's essential to understand such things as the Internet and the working of Email – Ken.*

It is recommended that these ideas be implemented as appropriate to other settings involved with similar kinds of volunteers and student groups. Perhaps they could be 'product developed' through a training institute, or a relevant organization, now that the findings of the study have highlighted the obvious benefits to learners, tutors and teachers. However, again, this would need to provide for a wide range of module choice, involving a flexible length of time to complete, otherwise it would exclude from participation those for whom it was intended.

In referring to the effects of the training reform agenda, Searle (1997) highlights that the focus on accredited courses and credentials in the training sector in general has resulted in a "decline in the number of volunteers in the TAFE sector, although there has been a slight increase in numbers in the community sector...despite the need for adult literacy provision, whether through community volunteer programs or more formal programs" (p.48). Volunteers in community programs can be less focussed on specific student competencies and outcomes. Her article considers the ethics of requiring volunteers to complete a program before they can assist others, and that as this becomes more formalised, then certain volunteers are more apprehensive. This was also found in our study. Despite the success of 'Adam' and 'Sandra' in engaging in the *Certificate III in Volunteer Tutoring* (after enculturation in the class setting), two others were daunted by it, despite being considered by the teacher-researcher to have the interest and life-skills to undertake it. 'Sandra' was initially concerned about her ability to complete the requirements. She showed the teacher-researcher the list of outcome statements and course overview she was given in the first session, and re-stated: "*I don't have as much education as everyone else in the class – I was the only one who hadn't done a (formal) tertiary course*". As Adam reported, one of his 'student colleagues' considered he needed to repeat the course because he didn't know enough, and another considered the language of the course was written by teachers for teachers. This other student withdrew. In summary, Adam made the following comment:

> *Well they didn't think they could cope with the course – I know there's some long 'way out' words – couldn't find them in the dictionary – but I asked the teacher to give a description of them – but with them they just didn't feel they could give it a go – Adam.*

Even a tutor program co-ordinator remarked at a workshop: "*The volunteer tutors are better trained in literacy strategies than the teachers*", concerning their training course. If the language serves to exclude those from participation who could be considered 'out groups', but who are seeking to assist other 'marginalised' groups within society, then what chance do we have? Freebody (1997) refers to "outsiding strategies (which) reflect and re-enact the moral organisation of a society" (p.11) through perceptions which make a causal link between low levels of literacy and unemployment. Lo Bianco (1997, p 31)

reveals that adult literacy policy is problematic if it does not consider social approaches to literacy: "Literacy is also a social practice residing in human networks which give it meaning and shape its forms" .

Other ethical issues in the utilisation of either paid or volunteer tutors relate to the size of one of the classes in particular, that is, possibly using volunteer tutors to substitute for an additional teacher, rather than to supplement delivery. The largest and most diverse group in disabilities was also influenced by funding constraints. Additionally, for learners with intellectual impairment and multiple disabilities, the remaining two sites had large groupings. Feedback from staff specific to the disability area (such as Support Workers, Carers, and Adult Training Centre Managers) indicated that they are not tied to class size to determine the viability of training. Therefore the delivery options in small groups would be considered plausible and essential to achieving realistic outcomes. The following comments from a Carer, 'Anita', in response to the student questionnaire, helps to elucidate this point:

> *Students in this class could not manage without lots of help – one teacher could not possibly provide all the assistance needed... Government or the bureaucracy use a single term (or two – impaired and disabled) to cover both mental and physical imperfections. I have sympathy for those class members (computer class) who have normal mental ability being put into a class with Sally. Their requirements are completely different – except that both need assistance. It is a credit to (teacher) and Co (volunteer tutors and tutors) that the needs of all students are attended to.*

Limitations of the Study and Further Research

This study has helped to further develop the link between theory and best practice for training volunteer tutors, to assist special needs literacy learners for the benefit of both.

Due to the shortage of teachers during the study period, to cover for our special needs/disability classes, the work towards the research project was additional to our normal teaching program. It was regrettable that more teachers from within our organisation and managers of the unit could not be involved to further the process, due to time constraints.

Although two teacher-researchers were involved with 11 tutors and a total of 32 learners, this would still be considered small scale practitioner-research within specific contexts. We have attempted to document enhanced performance of volunteer tutors within this community of learners, with reference to the changing profile of volunteer tutors. An improved quality of learning was highlighted through the volunteer experience, such as a broader view of learning that went beyond courses and workshops to include mentoring, peer support, and information needs (McCabe 1997).

The exploratory interviews and research questions attempted to reveal the needs and interpret the goals of volunteer tutors in an informal learning situation. Further study could be conducted to document (effective) interaction between teachers, volunteer tutors and adult students within the classroom, and more specific kinds of literacy learning and learning-to learn which occur as a result of this. It is also predicted that the philosophies and constructive approaches of the teachers would heavily influence this.

The opportunity to productively help improved tutors' confidence levels seemed to assist with vocational outcomes and goals. Several volunteer tutors gained employment. Improved outcomes for learners would also be predicted through continued class attendance due to more individual needs being met, through assistance from volunteer tutors, as guided by the class teacher.

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Appendix I

Semi-structured/exploratory interview — Volunteer Tutors

> *...we're looking at how we operate with tutors – seeing if we can improve and develop some kind of volunteer tutor course for this area... Given that you have already spent a lot of time as a volunteer tutor (and/or now tutor)... we'd like to seek your views. There's not a right or a wrong answer to any of the questions... interested in the input from the people doing it now (confidentiality ensured... if used/wrote anything check it with you first).*

Has being a volunteer tutor helped you or not?

In what ways?

What things helped the most? Or not? What were significant?

How did you feel at first about tutoring?

And now?

If you knew then what you know now what would you suggest were essential things (topics/ideas/information/knowledge) for people to have?

What would you have appreciated knowing or doing? Or do you think you had to go through a process? There's not a right answer. We need to hear your views. What were the advantages/disadvantages for you?

Would you have wanted to do an established course in volunteer tutoring from beginning? (3 hours a week for 10 weeks – assignments)

And now? What length of time would be appropriate for such a course? What sort of things would you suggest should be covered?

Appendix II

Students Views — Questionnaire (also a check on ethics)

Do you feel that you have a skill that you can pass on to other students in the class? What are you good at that you have noticed others can/can't do ?

Why do you think the teacher arranged to have tutors in the class?

How do you feel about having the tutors helping you in the class?

How do you think the tutors help in your class? You?

How would you feel about helping out others? What would be some of the advantages for you? Disadvantages? (ie. Do you think this helps you or wastes your time?)

Other comments? (you can use the back page if you wish)

Appendix III

Follow-up questionnaire – from interview

Has being a volunteer tutor helped you or not?

In what ways?

What things helped the most? Or not? What were significant?

How did you feel at first about tutoring?

And now?

If you knew then what you know now what would you suggest were essential things (topics/ideas/information/knowledge) for people to have?

What would you have appreciated knowing or doing? Or do you think you had to go through a process? There's not a right answer. We need to hear your views. What were the advantages/disadvantages for you?

Would you have wanted to do an established course in volunteer tutoring from beginning? (3 hours a week for 10 weeks – assignments – open book)

And now? What length of time would be appropriate for such a course? What sort of things would you suggest should be covered?

3 Evaluation report of the Community Literacy Voluntary Tutor Training Program for youth workers

Marya McDonald

Acknowledgement

The Project Officer thanks and acknowledges the assistance of ALNARC for funding received under the Small Projects scheme.

Introduction

Young people often approach youth workers for generalized interaction, referral, support and advocacy during their time of crisis. Significant numbers of those young people are early school leavers with low literacy skills and are either voluntarily or involuntarily looking for some kind of an intervention or support in the management of their often multi-faceted problems. Whilst youth workers offer this support and advice voluntarily as an often 'unevaluated' component of assistance to young clients, often they do not consciously identify the critical difference which literacy intervention may or does make. They often complete the literacy focused crisis task for the client in which case the client achieves only a short term objective. Consciousness raising and encouraging youth workers to see themselves as well positioned to give the client overall improved skill levels, or an alternative strategy to achieving literacy competence, are major factors in increasing the skill levels of disadvantaged young people.

Substantial evidence was gathered over time from regional and urban enquiries by the Youth Sector Training Council of Queensland (YSTC) which suggested that youth workers were being asked by young people themselves to provide literacy support. This evidence was gleaned from training activity evaluation reports from field trainers and youth worker participants and from training agreements with Cert III Youth Work clients who are directly questioned about literacy competence as part of the formal instrument for entry into general entry level training agreements.

Because there have been many youth workers already offering literacy support to their clients, although perhaps neither recognizing nor acknowledging it as a disparate and priority activity, more thorough research was done by direct questioning of field workers to examine the possible benefits of a voluntary tutor training program being delivered by an expert literacy teacher in close partnership with youth sector workers.

As a result of the demonstrated need in the field, YSTC received funding from DETIR to provide training for community based youth workers to complete voluntary tutor training programs in literacy/numeracy in order to broaden and enhance their existing skills to be able to better accommodate the most appropriate literacy support for young people.

The training was delivered in four locations, namely Noosa, Rockhampton, Mackay and Brisbane as these areas were felt to be areas of high youth unemployment and of outer urban or provincial city character and yet not sufficiently remote to attract special funding from governments for these peculiarly disadvantaged young people. Also the responses to direct enquiries to field workers clustered these respondents around roughly these areas. Any youth worker, either employed fulltime or in a significant voluntary involvement in the youth sector was potentially able to attend training provided that they agreed that they had a reasonable chance of adhering to the voluntary field work assessment regime.

A total number of twenty-five people attended the training. Of these, twenty-two filled out fully the evaluation forms on completion of the three days' program.

Purpose of the research

Further funding was sought and received from the Queensland Adult Literacy and Numeracy Australian Research Consortium Centre (ALNARC) to enable YSTC to undertake some limited action research on the program, particularly the effectiveness of the training materials and information given to the participants, and how they felt that the program assisted them in their interactions with their clients. We also wanted to research, firstly their overall perceptions of the possibility which even limited training gave them to become more aware of the significance of literacy/numeracy deficits in the overall scale of difficulties which disadvantaged young people experience, and, secondly, how these difficulties might be assisted by a set of strategies aimed at raising literacy/numeracy skill levels. Given the size of the project budget only the first initiative was able to be pursued.

ALNARC funding as well as the purposes of the research question equally determined the nature of the project as a small exercise in direct action research and evaluation of the field work instruments which the direct action generated.

Literature survey

The complex and interlocking problems of disadvantaged young people or youth at risk are well documented and justify an in-depth analysis in a literature survey carried out under the aegis of this project fund. However it is sufficient to say, in summary, that the overall picture for disadvantaged young people is a pessimistic one. Commonwealth government policy on youth has identified a climate of erosion of quality and quantity in both educational and life style outcomes for certain 'at risk' groups (*Skills for Australia*, 1988, *Australia's Language and Literacy Policy*, 1991, *Mayer Report*, 1992, *Working Nation*, 1994). Consequently, it has focused upon key issues and problems like the rising youth suicide rate, youth poverty, homelessness and youth crime, all of which are increasing in Queensland.

Statistical evidence reveals:

- court resolved offences have increased 22% between 1997 and 1998;
- Australia wide, 1 in 12 young persons lives in poverty (The Courier Mail 6/7/1998 and The Sunday Mail 5/7/1998).

The scenario for literacy/numeracy is also a depressing equation:

- low skills and/or information poor leading to alienation;
- sometimes relative economic poverty or/no employment;
- or no access to training as the skill level for entrance is too low and eroded by lack of usage;
- no or reduced Youth Allowance based on parental income and lack of circumstances qualifying the client for 'Exemption';
- increased crime, homelessness, which impacts on the general/community dysfunction.

As a result of these factors there is a need for increased government funding for 'rescue packages'.

Coupled with the increasing incidence of youth unemployment (*Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Statistics*, 1996) is the advance of job restructuring which is having the effect of abolishing a whole category of unskilled and semi-skilled work which previously may have fallen to the lot of youth who left school early with no, or marginally developed, skills (*Turning the key: meeting the literacy needs of youth at risk*, 1991). Smaller numbers of young people are accessing ever lower numbers of apprenticeships and, despite many years of funding of the TAFE sector for literacy/numeracy programs and a re-emphasis on these programs in schools, there is a well-founded community perception that youth have significantly lower skills, greater actual illiteracy and poorer numeracy and oracy (*Literacy for the Labour Market*, DEET, 1993) than in earlier historical periods.

Compounding the difficulties of the projected target group are amendments to Youth Allowance payments which are being implemented in January 1999 in apparent isolation by the Federal government as cost saving measures rather than in the context of the overall reduced disposable family income. Unfortunately the Commonwealth funding program for youth who are either unemployed, at risk or seeking to undergo further education and/or training (especially the group 15–18 years, even 15–21 years) allows seriously insufficient financial provision to make any real inroads into their problems, other than returning students of this age from DSS benefit to the schooling or training system and to the financial resources of their families.

There was little evidence from previous research that the workers who engage with these disadvantaged young people include in their training a focus on actual strategies to rectify long term literacy and numeracy deficits and it was for this reason that the voluntary program was instituted based on internal polling and anecdotal reports from field training events.

The purpose of the tutor training program

The aims of the voluntary literacy training course were to enable youth workers to incorporate basic tutoring skills into the general framework of their daily dealings with young people. It was envisaged that, at the finish of the course, youth workers would be able to assist their clients, not only with personally employed literacy tutoring skills, but with the use of assessing and referral skills that are essential tools in helping early school leavers back into appropriate learning and vocational fields.

Training goals

The CNVOC006 Certificate course followed VETEC Best Practice Guidelines and aimed to meet an ongoing industry need and according to that to deliver the competencies required by a volunteer literacy tutor. However the program focused specifically on the educational needs of young people. As a result the program material was significantly modified to incorporate a youth focus. In addition a special preview book was sent to participants (Appendix I but without its proprietary cover page). Tutors were trained to develop:

- a better strategy to identify literacy difficulties in young people;
- a sound knowledge of the foundation of assessment;
- an understanding of the basic levels of competency standards;
- referral skills;
- strategies for tutoring young people in the understanding of macro skills and their interdependence;
- expertise in planning and building simple learning programs;
- delegating and referral skills.

The training development process and methodology

The project was budgeted and coordinated in cooperation with the literacy trainer and two quarter time YSTC workers during the duration of training phase. The specific needs of young people were identified and described by a qualified researcher. Resources were drawn from the YSTC library and the experiences of youth workers and the literacy trainer. The sites were identified according to the responses of community Youth Workers to a particular piece of research carried out by YSTC which targeted the interest of youth workers in participation of voluntary tutor training programs.

While the content of the training and assessment materials was under development, which included drafting moderation field trials and review, the marketing of the program was organised in order to target the appropriate community and network members identified as wanting to attend the training. Pamphlets were designed with promotional material and training registration forms were delivered to the training sites. Where it was possible, telephone contacts were established with youth coordinators which helped to promote the

program for the purpose of increasing the opportunity to offer the course to wider numbers of participants.

The training was scheduled to run at the following sites with the following dates and all sites completed the training:

Noosa	22–24 July 1999
Rockhampton	29–31 July 1999
Mackay	5–7 August 1999
Brisbane	12–14 August 1999

Evaluation summary of training course

The training program was evaluated by two processes. The first was by asking a series of standardized questions from the participants on their experiences and reports of the training events. The second was by requiring the trainer to write a report on each training event and a summary report included in this document as an overall statement of the effectiveness of the training.

Findings and discussion

1. Training program and learning outcomes

The training was designed to run through three consecutive days, two week days and one day on the weekend. The content was delivered through a combination of didactic, experiential and participatory methodology. The learning outcomes for the training were that on the completion of the training the participants will be able to:

- provide details of the volunteer tutor (VT) training program to an interested person;
- explain the responsibilities of a VT within a VT program
- determine learners' needs;
- select learning strategies for a young person;
- analyse a range of spoken and written text for suitability in VET;
- prepare resources that are appropriate to the learner;
- devise strategies for tutoring macro skills;
- identify, document, devise and develop learning strategies specifically for literacy and numeracy;
- create tutoring plans, and to implement and evaluate them.

2. Participants' evaluation

Following the program, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire prepared by YSTC. The form dealt with the effectiveness of the Tutor Training program and its preparation.

The questionnaire identified the following issues:

1. Satisfaction with the content of the training;
2. Satisfaction with the quality of the delivery;
3. Professional knowledge of the trainer;
4. Possible application of knowledge gained through training;
5. Process of enrolment;
6. Satisfaction with the place and time of venue;
7. Satisfaction with the quality of catering (Appendix III).

Analysis of the participant evaluations

The majority of the participants were satisfied with all the aspects of the training, including the content, delivery, professional knowledge of the trainer as well as the catering and the place and time of the venue. There was a general agreement that the training was an effective vehicle to address already existing community needs in the area of youth work. It also ensured that the needs of young people would be strictly addressed. There were participants who had the need for addressing increased conflict resolution skills and further training in the area of macro-skills with the involvement of accelerated learning.

Participants further expressed their satisfaction with the professionalism demonstrated by the trainer (some of them in writing). Unfortunately there were trainees who didn't fill out the forms as required which diminished the possibility of a really comprehensive assessment. One of the outcomes of the training was a general agreement about the usefulness and broad applicability of the learning materials with some suggestions for moderation incorporated into later versions.

As a requisite of the course, participants were required to complete a written assessment which would indicate the extent of their understanding of planning and implementing training processes, along with the evaluation of the educational growth of their students' and their own capabilities of teaching them.

Because of the voluntary nature of the participants' involvement in the literacy and numeracy field and the practicality of the final assessment which was based on field work, it was hard and time consuming for the participants to complete the last requirement of the course, that was the completion of an assessment booklet (Appendix II) with the proofs of finished practical teaching plans, their implementation and evaluation. Only a small percentage of the booklets had arrived at the time of production of this report, but there were some written and verbal notices that the rest of the assessments are in train or near to completion and ready for finalising assessments to obtain certificates.

The difficulties which competent and literate professional youth workers had with allocating time to complete written tasks was demonstrative of a very real problem that professional workers have identified. They are all doing more work than they perceive that they have sufficient available time to complete within their paid allocation. This has little to do with the time frames set for the completion of the actual written tasks; in this sense, even almost indefinite time extensions would not have led to a higher completion rate since the real problem is that these workers feel that they do not have nearly enough time for their jobs, much less any additional extras.

In the field of other youth work training, self-assessment instruments such as those, for instance, which are used for the purposes for workers identifying competence which would enable RPL assessment, are not only available but are used and trusted as reliable survey instruments and true and accurate records of competence. These are often not written tests or tasks but can be personally administered by an assessor/mentor, either in person or by phone, where workers are really pressed and distressed by time management constraints. These alternative instruments are not compromised in terms of the assessment outcomes by virtue of this method of application. The development of alternative assessments methods, instruments and protocols is one of the strongest recommendations of this project.

3. Trainer's observations and evaluation

As a trainer, I was generally satisfied with the process and the outcome of the training which were particularly well-received outside of Noosa. The overall and most effective aspect of the training appeared to be the responsiveness of the participants to the tools, strategies, techniques and models of the framework employed throughout the training.

I believe that the use of case-studies in the teaching materials and the unusual teaching techniques with the elements of accelerated learning within the macro skills helped the participants to understand their clients' educational needs and learning difficulties. Moreover the program expanded their own teaching techniques as well. I am confident that the training outcomes widely met the needs of the trainees. Nonetheless, the voluntary nature of the participants and the 'portability' and other factors of disadvantage among the youth clients with the greatest needs indicate to me that the processes of assessment and the assessment instruments need extensive re-thinking and re-writing with a much longer and better supported time frame or alternative methods of self assessment like telephone interviewing need to be investigated and developed.

I was very satisfied with the support I had received from YSTC throughout developing and delivering the training. I hope that useful training programs, such as the voluntary tutor training program for youth workers, will attract future funded training programs so that more funds will be available to continue the validation of young people's educational needs through the people who are the closest to them and have the greatest chance to help them in every way.

Conclusions

It has been an overwhelming finding of this project that, with this particular client group and possibly with all hard pressed professional field workers, adaptive instruments and self-assessing fields activities become the primary assessment tools. This was a revelation in some senses to the project officer and yet is not inconsistent with findings in the literature.

What made this a revelation in practice was that, traditionally and currently, literacy/numeracy assessment, delivery and evaluation has not been the core business of the YSTC course delivery. Such intervention which occurs (and actually occurs frequently) happens in a sense without much deliberate reflection or critique. Often it is in response to the immediate and urgent demands for assistance which 'fix' short term problems for the client but offers no longer term recognition that these young people need access to training or programs which will materially affect and improve their overall literacy/numeracy skill levels.

The consequence for such an approach in youth field work is that the application of more and more short term 'band aids' will only solve short term crises without materially improving disadvantaged young people's overall levels of skill. The consequences of disadvantage are, in effect, only postponed to the next crisis where the youth worker must again intervene to avert another crisis because the young person has no more real skills, unless in exceptional circumstances, than previously. The adage is: 'If nothing changes, nothing changes!'

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, YSTC would make the following recommendations:

1. That further training programs of this type be instituted for 'new' youth worker participants in order to increase the consciousness of this group in the high level of relevance that significant literacy/numeracy deficits can have in the long term perpetuation of the disadvantage of young people;
2. That comprehensive follow up be undertaken on youth workers who participated in the training so that a type of meta-critical reflective practice is encouraged in these people plus a loop of on-going feedback put in place;
3. That quite different and flexible protocols and procedures for assessment be set in place along the lines of flexible delivery and RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) as is good professional practice in the areas of YSTC's core business;
4. That YSTC itself continue to explore service delivery in the area of literacy/numeracy which hitherto has not been this organisation's core business.

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Appendix I

Introduction

Young people in society

A growing number of studies on youth unemployment bears witness to the ever increasing awareness of the gravity of educational problems among young people. There are signs that the problem will be a continuing one. In recent decades the change of the market economy especially for young persons attempting general level entry with low level skills and the technological revolution which has reduced the numbers and types of jobs available to such a potentially disadvantaged group has produced a modification in the types of skills demanded by the labour market. In addition to these labour market forces the operational and implementation aspects of educational and schooling programs increasingly force cognitive skills instruction through content subjects which are geared toward further and higher education. Although there is latterly an attempt in the schooling sector to expand vocational education and training agendas and curricula, this is still a work in progress and not generally available to those especially disadvantaged students with the lowest levels of basic educational competence.

Those young people who for generational or personal reasons cannot keep up with the demands of receiving instruction in essentially cognitive skills, delivered in an 'academic' mode and environment, become failures in schools. The history of being a failure leads them to the inevitable conclusion that they will not be able to obtain skilled worker certification. The earlier belief that they are not 'good enough' re-enforces their low self-esteem and leads to further compounding sense of failure.

These are among the valid reasons why the competitive position of young people in respect of access to education and training from a skills base of basic competence in literacy/numeracy tasks is significantly weaker than other age groups. While older workers tend to be protected by legislation, collective bargaining arrangements and conventional personal practices associated with developed life experience and peer and professional relationships, young people without significant personal resources, life experience and low literacy/numeracy skills seem to become the victims of socio-economic situations. They lose their chances in the competitive labour market and they are not given an appropriate time frame again for a new 'make-over'.

About literacy

To have a literacy 'problem' has a negative connotation. For most people, it means simply not being able to read and write. However, to comprehensively define the purposes to which people may put literacy means so much more than just being unable to draw or interpret symbols on paper. To be literate is a

uniquely human experience, hence it enables us to communicate with each other better. It is never just mechanical, depending upon skills which are taught, but it is an individual crafting of the making of meaning out of interactions and it changes all the time with cultures and circumstances.

Literacy is a skill that integrates listening, speaking, writing and critical thinking. It incorporates numeracy as well, as numeracy is another essential component in training a logical and critical mind. Cultural knowledge is part of literacy by enabling the person of a particular culture to recognise and use language appropriately in different social situations.

Expansion of technology into every corner of society has created literacy demands which are beyond the general skills of many young people without the advantage of general entry competence. These particular young people may come from a variety of different backgrounds and circumstances. However the predisposition of certain target groups like Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, non-English speaking background young people, persistent school truants, young people in care and correctional institutions and young people with other factors of socio-economic, health or housing related or isolated circumstances to be especially disadvantaged is well documented in the literature.

The goal of literacy training is to enhance young people's capacity to think, create questions in their own minds which would help them become more aware of the world around them and also empower them to participate more effectively in society, in other words to teach them functional literacy.

Functional literacy is a standard of literacy skill which anyone needs to be able to cope with life. This can vary according to jobs, life styles or the changes which could be encountered in daily living because of change and development in different life and work circumstances. For example, young people might have to learn to understand simple instructions or lists and directories. They might want to read and comprehend in greater varieties of text formats and multi media presentations. They might want to use their numeracy skills to deal with wages, rents, rates or hire purchase. If the teaching material is not solely guided by abstract educational theory but by unconventional applications from any life or work setting–according to individual needs and wants–a higher level of success can be achieved in the young person's ability to be able to face the challenge of problematic areas.

Youth worker as tutor

The Youth Sector decided to combine its expertise with the expertise of tutor trainers to offer a better remedy for those young people who have become marginalised because of their low educational level particularly where this is reflected in poor literacy/numeracy or basic entry level educational skills. Because young people approach youth workers for general interaction, referral, support and advocacy, youth workers are the ones who help them through the process of development and, often for this particular group of disadvantaged young person, developmental crisis. As a result, youth workers are more likely to

be in the position to develop relationships with young people based on mutual trust and collaborative decision-making. This kind of a partnership carries the potential to enable young people to access appropriate literacy support which would best meet their needs.

Though young people approach youth workers for various assistance, they are often highly skilled at hiding their low literacy levels. During improved interaction and support, they might start to look for some kind of voluntary or involuntary intervention in order to enable assistance with their literacy problems. At the moment those youth workers who are offering support to young people with literacy difficulties may not really be aware of the benefit of their tutoring support. Developing appropriate tutoring skills could enable greater possibilities for meeting young people's educational and training needs. Although those needs seem to be second order after essential life maintenance issues, they are among the most serious issues in the whole range and complexity of young people's problems because they constitute a base line of assessment of competence from which the provision of related and other support services will be generated.

The tutor training program is designed to help those workers who want to enhance and multiply their existing skills in order to offer personal support to young people who are seriously disadvantaged by having inadequate literacy levels.

The purpose of the course

The aims of the course are to enable youth workers to incorporate basic tutoring skills into the general framework of dealing with young people. The additional aim is to enable detection and remediation of basic education (literacy/numeracy) deficits in a group of young people who are seriously disadvantaged in terms of access to education and training and as a result to labour market opportunities by virtue of these deficits.

The course is developed around five basic skills in doing initial assessments and (if it is required) providing ongoing literacy support for illiterate young people. Youth workers will be able to assist their clients, not only with personally employed literacy tutoring skills, but with the use of delegating skills that are essential tools in helping early school leavers back to appropriate learning and vocational fields.

The objectives of the Voluntary Tutor Training Program are to assist youth workers to develop abilities in order to be able to use:

- a better strategy in identifying literacy problems;
- basic skills to assess the level of literacy problems;
- planning learning programs;
- tutoring skills to improve young people's macro skills;
- improving referring skills;
- delegating skills.

This course has been developed around three booklets. These are the Preview Book, the Training Book and the Assessment Book.
The Preview Book outlines the aims, objectives, modules, learning outcomes, and entry requirements and the modes of assessments, as well as containing other readings. The chapter on Health and Safety is for general information, as all workplaces conduct those types of education under relevant legislative requirements. In accordance with NFROT (National Framework for the Recognition of Training), Workplace Health and Safety has to be included into the teaching material as a compulsory part of the training and the assessment as well. The other readings are short but relevant tutor training materials. The Preview Booklet draft is appended to this proposal but without a cover page which will be developed later after feedback from ALNARC and stakeholders.

The Training Book contains notes and resources for the course as well as for later use and it will be used during the face-to-face training.

The Assessment Book is a separate book which has to be filled out and posted to Youth Sector Training Council of QLD within three weeks from the date of finishing both the off-the-job and the on-the-job training. The means of assessments will be discussed at the end of the face-to-face training. The three books were designed in such a way as to assist flexible delivery and learning, also to speed up the training process.

Volunteer tutoring in literacy

The course has been developed using VETEC Best Practice Guidelines to supply an ongoing industry need and according to that, deliver the competencies required by a Volunteer Literacy Tutor. The learning outcomes of the four modules must be successfully completed.

The modules of the program

LLN001 Introduction to volunteer tutoring

LLN002 Tutoring young people as adult learners
Learning strategies for tutoring according to the needs of young people based on adult learning principles
Written and spoken texts suitable for young people

LLN003 Tutoring in a learning environment
Principles of initial assessment
Determining needs
Planning for tutoring
Evaluating tutoring
Improving tutoring skills

LLN005 Strategies for literacy tutoring
The macro skills
Language Experience Approach
(LEA) a holistic approach
the reading process (strategies and resources suitable)
the writing process (strategies and resources suitable)
Numeracy (strategies and resources suitable for young people needing numeracy skills)
Numeracy (strategies and resources for young people needing reasoning skills)
Implementing the learning program

The learning outcomes

LLN001 – Introduction to Volunteer Tutoring

Learning outcome 1. Provide details of the Volunteer Tutor Program to interested person.

Learning outcome 2. Explain the responsibilities of the Volunteer tutor Program and the relevant Institution.

LLN002 – Tutoring young people as adult learners

Learning outcome 1. Select learning strategies based on adult learning principles for proposed tutoring of a student

Learning outcome 2. Analyse a range of spoken and written texts for suitability in Volunteer Tutoring of young people as adult learners

LLN003 – Tutoring in a learning program

Learning outcome 1. Determine student's details in relation to tutoring session

Learning outcome 2. Create flexible tutoring plans in the required format

Learning outcome 3. Implement tutoring according to the documented tutoring plan

LLN005 – Strategies for literacy tutoring

Learning outcome 1. Devise strategies for tutoring in literacy that are appropriate to the learner, tutoring purpose and selected macro skill

Learning outcome 2. Prepare resources for tutoring in literacy that are appropriate to the learner, tutoring purpose and text (aural, oral or written)

Successful graduates in Volunteer Tutoring (Literacy) will be competent in terms of the Competency Standards for Volunteer Literacy Tutors within the programs funded by the Commonwealth and State Governments as an efficient and cost effective means of providing individualised face-to-face assistance. The Curriculum Advisory Committee confirmed the course credential level is appropriate in terms of the Australian Qualification Framework and is achievable within the nominal duration.

Entry requirements of the course

According to NFROT Principles 1, 4, and 8:

- demonstrated competence in English language and literacy equal to or higher than the level of the Program;
- periodical medical and atmospheric contaminant level testing.

Risk management for tutors

Tutors are not employees and therefore not covered by Workers' Compensation, unless the provision of their literacy assistance though voluntary is inclusive to their job. Check with your institution when and where the tutoring sessions are or will be held, especially if you have to travel to and from the tutoring venue.

Remember, the institutes or workplaces for which volunteers work have liabilities under agreement only.

Obligations

It is every institute and workplace's responsibility to ensure that employees and visitors will not be exposed to health and safety risks, but it is employees and visitors' obligation to take steps to ensure their own health and safety. This means that all persons are obliged to comply with the institute or workplace's safety system.

It is *your* responsibility to be aware of relevant signs, safety policies and the rule of conducts in the case of hazards.

Appendix II: Sample assessment tasks (Written)

LLN001 – Assessment task

In approximately half a page explain the role of a volunteer tutor in a literacy program and the types of young people who need help. You should include some comments about the importance of confidentiality and refer to issues of personal safety and H&S legislation.

LLN002 – Assessment task

Andrew is nineteen years old and left school after the fifth grade. He can write his name, address and telephone number only if he is shown where he has to write down his personal information. Andrew has a part time job in a timber yard, where no one knows his literacy problem. He is a library member and loves looking at pictures in geographical books. He plays indoor-cricket and part of the local team where he lives.

List three written and three spoken texts which could be useful in a tutoring program with a student like Andrew.

In a short paragraph explain why you have chosen these texts. You may like to comment on any adult learning principles, student needs or interest that influenced your choice.

LLN003 – Assessment task

Developing a strategy to help a low level student.

Choose one of Andrew's interests to use in a Language Experience lesson.

Write three open ended questions you could use to elicit a suitable piece of text in this situation.

Create a suitable written text and present it in a script appropriate for use with a low level student like Andrew.

LN005 – Assessment task

Write a case study of a student with a reading problem. Choose a suitable resource that would be appropriate to use and describe strategies that you would use with that student.

Below is a case study of an adult with a reading problem. Read the text and then complete the next question.

CASE STUDY 1

Anita is twenty–three years old. Her mother died when she was sixteen. She has a sister who was five and a brother who was twelve when her mother died.

Her father is a night shift worker in a factory and he is not used to bringing the children up.

In order to be able to look after her brother and sister, Anita dropped out of school which she wasn't really sorry about. She never liked studying and wasn't good at it anyway. She decided to try to get a job in an elderly people's home but she realised with no experience or qualifications she hasn't much hope of getting one. She loves gardening and talking with and about children. She is a good cook and collects recipes but as far as her recipes go she is not concerned about her reading and writing skill, as she said, the cakes do not need one!

She does not bother about her maths skill either, because her father is the one who manages the financial affairs.

Though she forgot what she had learned in school, she wouldn't mind to have a better literacy skill but has no idea how to go about it, neither does she know what would interest her beside her chore, which she actually likes doing.

Choose a resource which you could use in helping Anita improve her reading. What strategies would you use with Anita? Explain why you have chosen this resource and these strategies.

What writing needs might Anita have? In a paragraph describe how you could help Anita to address her writing needs.

CASE STUDY 2

Gail is twenty–two and has no problems with her reading and writing. She has numeracy problems though. She does not have any basic skills nor can she do problem solving. She cannot even explain how she was able to hide such a problem for such a long time. Without her fingers she cannot even add the simplest numbers. She does not know where to start but wants to get rid of her problem because it badly affects her self-esteem.

Choose a resource appropriate for helping the student to improve numeracy skills. Explain how you would use this material in a positive learning situation.

LLN003 – Assessment task

The purpose of the module is to help the voluntary tutor to acquire skills and knowledge in the preparation, delivery and evaluation of his/her own tutoring program. The assessment is based on the lesson preparation according to the profile of a personally selected student and approximately fifteen contact hours of the actual lesson delivery. For the module LLN003 to be accomplished within three to four weeks after the finishing of the face-to-face training, it is desirable for the tutor to complete all the assessments of the prerequisite modules as well establishing a well-written personal profile of his/her student along with the teaching plan to be able to execute a good delivery program.

Determine student's details in relation to tutoring sessions using the following form.

STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET

STUDENT'S NAME _____

ADDRESS _____ POSTCODE _____

Telephone numbers (home) _____ (emergency) _____

AGE _____ SEX ____ INITIAL CONTACT DATE _____

EMPLOYMENT _____

Does anyone know that the student is seeking help?

What specific help did the student ask for?

How does the student want to make use of improved literacy skill?

Student's educational history.

Student's occupational history.

Student's family history.

Student personal background.

Create a flexible tutoring plan in the required format.

Implement tutoring according to documented tutoring plan.

Adjust tutoring to match distractions occurring during tutoring

Evaluate the delivery of tutoring.

Clues to better planning!

- Establish a good student background
  - Discuss needs
  - Undertake a good initial assessment.
- Negotiate activities, resources.
- Document plan
  - Integrate adult learning principles
  - Plan realistic goals.
- Set a positive environment
  - Be student focused
  - Demonstrate a systematic approach
  - Encourage
  - Negotiate follow-up work.
- Monitor external distractions
  - student's non-verbal communication
  - utilisation of incidental learning
  - motivation, ability to give and accept feedback.
- Document student's progress
  - Identify cause of lack of success.
- Formulate an action to improve tutoring skill.

Appendix III

Tables of Results

Satisfaction with the content of the training

	excellent	good	fair	poor	no answer
Noosa		1	1		3
Rockhampton	2	5			
Mackay	9				
Brisbane	2	1			

Satisfaction with the quality of delivery

	excellent	good	fair	poor	no answer
Noosa	1				4
Rockhampton	6	1			
Mackay	8				1
Brisbane	2	1			

Professional knowledge of the trainer

	excellent	good	fair	poor	no answer
Noosa	1				4
Rockhampton	6	1			
Mackay	8				1
Brisbane	2	1			

Possible application of knowledge gained through training events

	able to	not able	with diversity	other info required	no answer
Noosa	1			1	3
Rockhampton	5		1		1
Mackay	8		2		1
Brisbane	1		1	1	

Process of enrolment

	excellent	good	fair	poor	no answer
Noosa		1			4
Rockhampton		7			
Mackay	9				2
Brisbane		2			1

Satisfaction with the place and time of venue

	excellent	good	fair	poor	no answer
Noosa		1	1		3
Rockhampton	4	3			
Mackay	4	3	2		2
Brisbane	1	1	1		

4 Preparing students to study by flexible delivery in the Certificate in Adult General Education

Luaine Hawkins

Acknowledgements

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I also acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the CAGE participants who contributed their time and reflections, and who did so with the expressed hope that other students will benefit from the study. The CAGE teachers and supporting staff, other members of the Adult Learning Service, and Institute personnel provided invaluable assistance in this project and this I also gratefully acknowledge.

Introduction

This project set out to evaluate the effectiveness of the preparatory course which was implemented in response to the special needs of learners in the Certificate in Adult General Education (CAGE).

CAGE is offered by flexible delivery to students who study off-site as well as on-site at one TAFE Institute in Far North Queensland, and the project evaluated the performance of students enrolled during one semester, some of whom had undertaken a preparatory bridging course. The study investigates the relationship between these clients' prior schooling, their personal characteristics such as motivation and experience with learning, and their time management, technology and study skills; all of which are necessary to succeed in flexible delivery.

The certificate in adult general education

The Certificate in Adult General Education (CAGE) aims to increase participation in education and training and enhance employment opportunities, by providing adult learners with the opportunity to study for an award, which is recognised as the equivalent of a Year 10 qualification. Year 10 is the minimum requirement necessary to access vocational courses, the Defence Forces, apprenticeships and many workplaces, such as the Public Service. CAGE is offered twice a year at this Institute and learners may enrol in all of the five

subjects, some of the subjects, or some modules of the subjects during an 18–week semester. Learners may:

- attend timetabled tutorials on-site where they work on an independent basis with teacher support;
- attend a Learning Support Centre which offers individual support for specific needs;
- study off-site, and send completed work in for assessment by the teachers employed to deliver the subject areas; or
- study using any combination of the above.

The course can be completed in one semester of 360 hours, or students may take a maximum of two years to complete their studies. They may apply to do the course at any time, and although most start at the beginning of a semester, there is some room for continuous enrolment depending on the number of overall enrolments in any one semester.

The course is delivered via pre-prepared packages, known as modules. There are three to six modules in each subject, and each module is estimated to take 12 to 20 hours to complete. Modules cover a range of activities using a variety of learning materials, such as videos, audio materials and printed matter to allow for different learning styles, and are designed to achieve specific learning outcomes. A competency-based assessment follows the successful completion of a module and tests achievement of the learning outcomes.

CAGE has been offered at this Institute for the past two years and between 20 and 40 students have enrolled in any one semester. However, despite a pre-course screening, the attrition rate and failure to participate satisfactorily in course work is extremely high. Significantly, in one semester last year 62.5% of the learners dropped out, and over the past two years only 7% of the learners have completed their course goals. Furthermore, CAGE teachers report that many clients have difficulty in recognising their own learning needs, while some remain very 'teacher dependent' throughout the course, all of which inhibit their ability to benefit from learning by flexible delivery.

Pre-course screening

On application to undertake CAGE, clients are interviewed to identify their learning needs, motivation and goals, and to ascertain previous educational experiences which may impact on their attitudes toward learning. They are asked about their home learning environment to evaluate what support they may or may not receive during their studies and they undertake a basic literacy and numeracy assessment to establish their skills in these areas. Applicants are then referred to a course appropriate to their needs and abilities, which may be CAGE, an upgrading course, or the further studies course Adult Tertiary Preparation, although this rarely happens. Of the students interviewed, on average, only half are identified as having the skills and disposition necessary to undertake CAGE.

Upgrading courses

Newstart

For the past seven years the Institute has offered Newstart, a 500–hour course in Personal and Employment focused literacy, numeracy and computer skills, to clients who wish to upgrade their skills in these areas. Originally developed with a vocational focus, the course is now seen as a 'holistic' program as it also offers students 20 hours of Pastoral Care as well as two 10–hour electives in First Aid and Communication Skills.

The course components are as follows:

- The Personal and Employment literacy, numeracy and computer components are skills based and focus on consolidating the students' skills and identifying their strengths and weaknesses through a variety of text types. Authentic tasks develop from activities such as note taking, report and letter writing, and telephone skills;
- In Pastoral Care students discuss problems which may be affecting their ability to study. They are encouraged to evaluate how they are going in the course, and they raise issues relating to teachers and other students in the course as well as organise some out-of-class activities which aim to increase their self-esteem and confidence in social and communication skills. The Pastoral Care teacher also follows up students who have not been attending. She says the success of this module depends on the group of students enrolled in any one course;
- First Aid aims at giving students experience in undertaking some 'real-world' education, and they receive a Certificate in First Aid after successful completion of this module;
- The Communications module covers listening skills, self-esteem, teamwork, problem solving, barriers to communication and assertiveness training through a variety of role-plays and brainstorming activities. Students analyse group interaction by evaluating desirable values and attitudes and they evaluate their own participation. They also plan and negotiate guest speakers.

For some time this course was the only option for clients who did not yet possess the skills to undertake CAGE, and many were referred to Newstart although it is not designed as a preparatory course for CAGE. At times this caused problems for some Newstart students who wanted to simply focus on their literacy and numeracy skills for personal or vocational reasons, and had no desire to undertake further education skills.

> *The students who were going on to do CAGE didn't want to do resume writing, as they didn't see this as relevant to CAGE.*

Teachers felt pressured to focus on skills necessary for CAGE and it was generally decided this was not the purpose of Newstart.

CAGE bridging

Based on this information from Newstart, the gaps identified in skill and dispositional readiness in current CAGE students, and the fact that 70 applicants had been identified as not yet ready to undertake CAGE, funding was made available for a CAGE preparatory course. Forty–four of the applicants who were still available were offered places in the two 150 hour Bridging courses, which were run concurrently.

In CAGE many students exhibit limited self-directed skills as identified through an inability to ask for assistance, locate resources or use peers and course facilitators as resources. These characteristics impact on their ability to be successful in a flexibly delivered course such as CAGE. Self-directedness is characterised by well developed reading, listening, observation and reflection skills, along with predispositional skills such as confidence as a learner, goals and an appreciation of the value of lifelong learning (Warner, Christie & Choy, 1998; Redding, Caudell & Lucias, 1999).

The Bridging course aimed to develop the learners' self-directedness and gradually introduce the learners to the concept of the teacher being a facilitator in their learning by:

- using booklets similar to the modules in CAGE, which contained written explanations and activities and aimed to build on their literacy and numeracy by developing their critical thinking, analytical and problem solving skills;
- learning how to locate and use human means of assistance and support, including interaction with peers, group work and tutorial sessions;
- learning how to locate physical learning resources in the library, such as books, videos, the Internet and CD-ROM.
- learning how to relate to teachers in a different way which is more friendly and equal than they are may be used to; and
- developing skills in goal setting, timetable management, and self-assessment.

Fifteen students completed the course, eight of whom were assessed as having demonstrated sufficient self-directed readiness to undertake CAGE the following semester.

Literature review

CAGE provides a bridge to further education and training and enhanced employment opportunities, but many students are failing because they are inadequately prepared for the transition from what they are used to. It is necessary to ensure that the equitable and flexible approach to learning does not disempower the very clients it is meant to empower.

So who are the CAGE clients?

CAGE clients represent a cross-section of the community. They are males and females, may be aged from 15 to 70, and come from diverse work and learning experiences. They also have a wide range of reasons for doing the course such as parental pressure, personal achievement and enhanced career options but what they have in common is that they are socially and economically disadvantaged by their low literacy and numeracy skills, and the fact that they do not have a Year 10 certificate.

In spite of recent government policies and initiatives focusing on educational attainment, career counselling, learning-to-work programs and participation, there are many young people with serious problems relating to education, training and employment according to the 1998 Dusseldorp Skills Forum report. This report states the Year 10 retention rate has fallen below 1990 levels and some 70% of school leavers are not completing Year 12. According to figures just released by the Queensland State Government, schools in the regional areas of the state have retention rates of between 25% and 63% for Year 12 (Haberfield, 1999), and a recent report, *Early School Leaving in Australia* (ACER Newsletter, 1999) found that boys, particularly those in regional and rural areas, are more likely to leave school early than girls, however "the proportion of female school leavers working in full-time jobs is much lower than that for males" (p.5).

There is considerable concern that youth unemployment is rising and that fewer jobs exist for unskilled, unqualified young people. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum commissioned two detailed investigations, *Australia's Young Adults: The Deepening Divide* (1998) which looked at young people aged 20 to 24 in the labour market, and *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risk* (1996) which took a national perspective on 15 to 19 year olds. The authors of both reports conclude that in Australia's rapidly changing labour markets where independence, autonomy, the capacity to consume, and the acquisition of qualifications to establish a lifelong career, young people are finding it increasingly difficult to find rewarding and valued work opportunities. The authors of *Australia's Youth: Reality and Risks* conclude that stronger social and educational foundations are needed to build "the skills required to participate in structured learning across all the stages of life" and that "early school leaving is becoming a significant factor in the continuing labour market disadvantage experienced by young people" (1996, pp.2 & 3). They recommend that not only schools but also TAFE institutes and universities should be responsible for providing career counselling and learning-to-work programs.

What is flexible delivery?

TAFE, which had been dominant in the provision of vocational education training, rose to the challenge of the open training market brought about by the National Training Reform Agenda in the early 1990s by adopting a system for the flexible delivery of training. There have been many descriptions and

definitions for the term 'flexible delivery'; however most agree it represents a pedagogical philosophy which is client focused, and assumes that learning will improve if it is tailored to the way students prefer to learn (Misko, 1994, p.4; ANTA, 1997).

TAFE Queensland defines flexible delivery as:

> *...an approach to vocational education and training which allows for the adoption of a range of learning strategies in a variety of learning environments to cater for differences in learning styles, learning interests and needs, and variations in learning opportunities.*
>
> (Singh, Harreveld & Hunt, 1997, p.112).

In this approach to learning the client may choose where, when, how and what they learn.

So what are the problems?

In adult basic education there is a general understanding that the learners have 'failed' in previous education and are now putting themselves on the line to try again. As adults they return to study voluntarily at their recognised point of failure, and can drop out any time they wish if the learning does not suit their purposes, however dropping out implies failure which further endorses negative aspects of learning self-concept (Warner, Christie & Choy, 1998; McCormack & Pancini, 1994; O'Neill, 1998). Certainly in CAGE, at this Institute, there has been a high attrition rate and a failure to meet individual goals, which warrants immediate attention. Teachers involved in the course continually complain students are not equipped with the skills and attitudes necessary to study by flexible delivery, and that they need more teacher direction than is built into the delivery of the current course. Students with low levels of literacy need extra support with their studies (Smith et al, 1997, p.46) and flexible delivery demands a more student-centred approach to teaching and learning which involves learners developing flexible learning strategies and being active participants in their own development (ANTA, 1997, p.7).

Warner, Christie and Choy (1998) state that VET clients prefer traditional approaches to learning and question the dispositional and skills readiness of clients to study by flexible delivery. Dispositional knowledge is having information about the appropriate values and attitudes that are required for a particular situation (Warner, Christie & Choy, 1998; Misko, 1995, p.32), and skills readiness refers to skills such as study skills, time-management skills and technology skills which may be transferable to a new situation.

Warner, Christie and Choy claim students in VET have poor levels of readiness for self-directed learning, possess tradition-bound orientations toward future lifelong learning, and possess low levels of confidence in themselves as autonomous learners. They claim traditional methods of course delivery in

compulsory schooling may have resulted in students not being adequately equipped with prerequisite skills or attitudes in independent learning, and they believe a 'culture shift' is required which "produces students who value and have skills in independent learning... as the present culture of teacher dependence has contributed to an attitude amongst students which is dependent and does not value alternative learning methods" (1998, pp10–11).

Independent, or self-directed learning, is a major construct of flexible delivery and refers to "the dispositions and capabilities of learners to accept responsibility for planning, seeking out learning resources, implementing and evaluating their own learning" (Brookfield, 1984, p.16). Malcolm Knowles (1975, p.18 cited by Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 1991) defines self-directed learning as "a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes". In self-directed learning students need to relate to teachers and peers in different ways as new relationships exist which are more co-operative, equal and friendly (Smith et al, 1997, p.90). They need to be assertive in seeking assistance, motivated, have organisational skills to get things done on time, and they require a certain level of language and literacy skills to engage in self-paced learning (Smith et al, 1997, p.95; Misko, 1994).

In a flexibly delivered course such as CAGE, students need to be able to meet deadlines, manage their own time, be appropriately assertive and able to seek support and assistance, and show a preparedness or willingness to take control of their learning.

How can these problems be remedied?

When we learn, we use the knowledge, skills and attitudes we have previously learned and 'transfer' them to the new context (Misko, 1995). The factors which inhibit transfer include motivation, confidence, prior knowledge, task familiarity, feedback and ability. Mayer (1992) identified seven generic skills he called key competencies which he says are "...essential for effective participation in further education and in adult life" (p.5). The transferability of these generic skills and the dispositional knowledge necessary for further learning in flexible delivery need to be explicitly taught (Warner, Christie & Choy, 1998; Misko, 1995). Adult students who have minimal education may also have few transferable cognitive or affective skills, so the aim of training at this level should be to identify the skills they currently have and build on these so that they can repeat or adapt them to a new context, and to provide support and guidance throughout the learning process. Studies in Sweden and the UK on distance education suggest some form of face-to-face contact needs to be included in any program to provide students with explanations of concepts, guidance, a sense of security, assistance and motivation (Misko, 1994, p.16). With the provision of high quality support before, and throughout, their learning these students can begin to reconstruct their reality.

The project design

A mixture of qualitative and quantitative methodologies was used to investigate the three focus questions of the study:

- do students who have undertaken a preparatory literacy course, Newstart or CAGE Bridging, demonstrate better self-directed learning skills?
- what strategies do students use, or fail to use, that demonstrate their readiness to study by flexible delivery?
- to what extent do factors such as experience in the work force, age, or goals, influence students' ability to adapt to flexible delivery?

These focus questions were investigated using case-study data-gathering procedures to establish a common discourse. The participants included CAGE students enrolled in the present course, and Institute personnel associated with the delivery of CAGE.

The data

The project utilized a variety of data sources for analysis which included:

Relevant documentation kept by the Institute

- student files which record personal information such as age, previous education and reasons for doing the course, academic results, learning outcomes successfully/unsuccessfully completed and copies of assessment feedback;
- class rolls of attendance and records of participation in the course work;
- exam results.

Anecdotal evidence

- teacher and associated personnel diary entries recording student/teacher interactions, and observations about coping and learning strategies used by the students.

Interviews

- audio-taped semi structured interviews with the learners (see Appendix I). These were conducted in the first half of the semester to establish and clarify pre-CAGE educational experiences and how these may or may not have prepared students for studying by flexible delivery, work history, reasons for doing CAGE, attitude toward study and schooling experiences, as well as feelings about the course and problems and frustrations encountered. Some off-site students were interviewed via the telephone but the majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face;
- unstructured interviews with the teachers involved in the course, Learning Support tutors, and administration staff. These were conducted to clarify points observed and those raised by the students.

Teachers from the Newstart Program and the CAGE Bridging course were also interviewed to gain information about the course content and dispositional skills displayed by students from those courses now studying in CAGE.

Questionnaire

- A focused questionnaire (see Appendix II) examined how the students feel about learning by flexible delivery, their study habits, ability to seek and use support, how they like to learn and how they perceive themselves as a learner. This was distributed half way through the semester and clarified much of the data previously collected.

The data collected was reviewed and systematically analysed to identify recurring themes and discourses and emerging patterns.

The participants

The students

Forty students were enrolled in CAGE in semester 2, 1999 and 28 of these participated in interviews and questionnaire. Students not surveyed either dropped out before they could be interviewed (10%), enrolled in the course too late in the semester to be able to provide consistent data (12.5%), or were unavailable for interviewing (7.5%). However some data obtained from the student files was considered to provide a general profile of the course participants which was:

Total Number of Students:	40
New Students:	23
Continuing Students:	17
Students studying off-site:	14
Students studying on-site:	26

Age and gender distribution

The age and gender distribution of the CAGE students (Table 1) was similar to that of the whole Institute where the majority of clients are aged under 20, and it also resembles the distribution of VET students involved in the study conducted by Warner, Christie and Choy (1998). However, unlike the ACER report (1999) which found boys are more likely to leave school early than girls, in this course there are almost equal numbers of males, 19, and females, 21. For those aged under 20, the ratio is still the same although there are more females aged 30 and over enrolled and only one male.

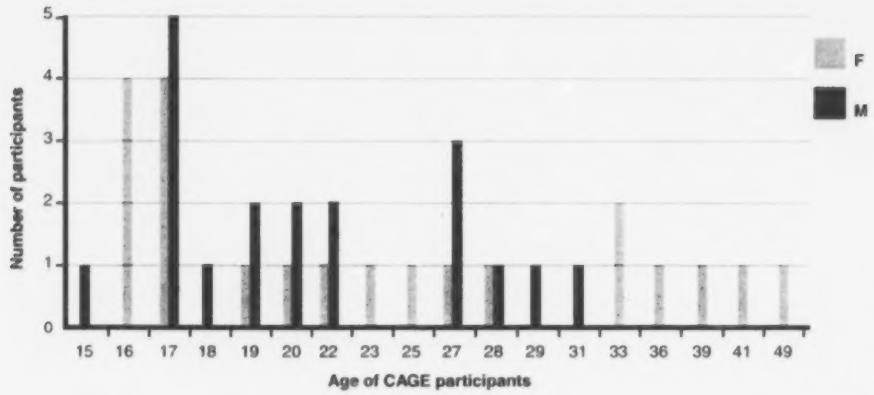

Table 1: Age and gender of CAGE participants

Level of schooling

With regards to the level of previous schooling (Table 2) the majority of students (67.5%) had not undertaken Year 10 as expected, although surprisingly 10% had completed Year 12 with poor results in Maths and/or English.

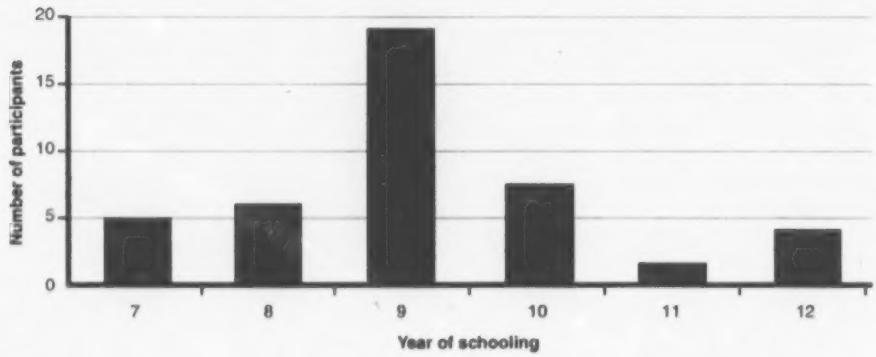

Table 2: Level of schooling

Previous courses undertaken

For the purposes of this study the students were surveyed to assess previous preparatory literacy courses they may have undertaken, and therefore any other courses they may have taken were classed as 'Other'. These courses comprised computer courses, a traineeship as a ringer, a General Nursing Certificate, and pre-vocational courses in tourism, electronics and childcare. As Table 3 shows, the majority of the students had not undertaken any courses since leaving school. Eight students were enrolled from the CAGE Bridging and nine had previously completed Newstart.

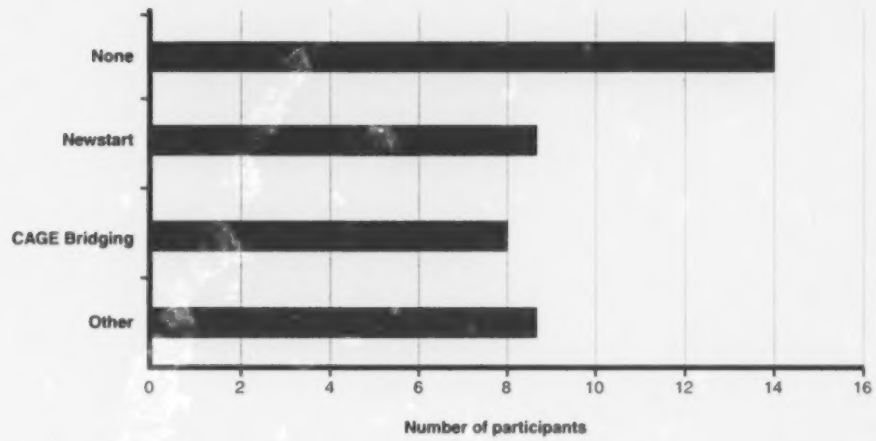

Table 3: Previous courses enrolled in

Reasons for doing this course

CAGE students represent pre-entry or pre-vocational clients and one of their main reasons for doing the course was to join the Defence Forces, which requires at least a Year 10 pass in Maths and English. Some students wanted to achieve their Year 10 for personal reasons. One student summarised his reasons as

> *Fear bred shame... I wanted to do CAGE primarily to learn, to take up a challenge and see what I really am capable of... a sense of achievement.*

The older students who had been in the workforce mainly wanted to increase their career opportunities, but 25% of the students could not articulate a clear reason for wanting to do the course. These students represented the younger age group, particularly those with no or little experience in the labour market (see Table 4).

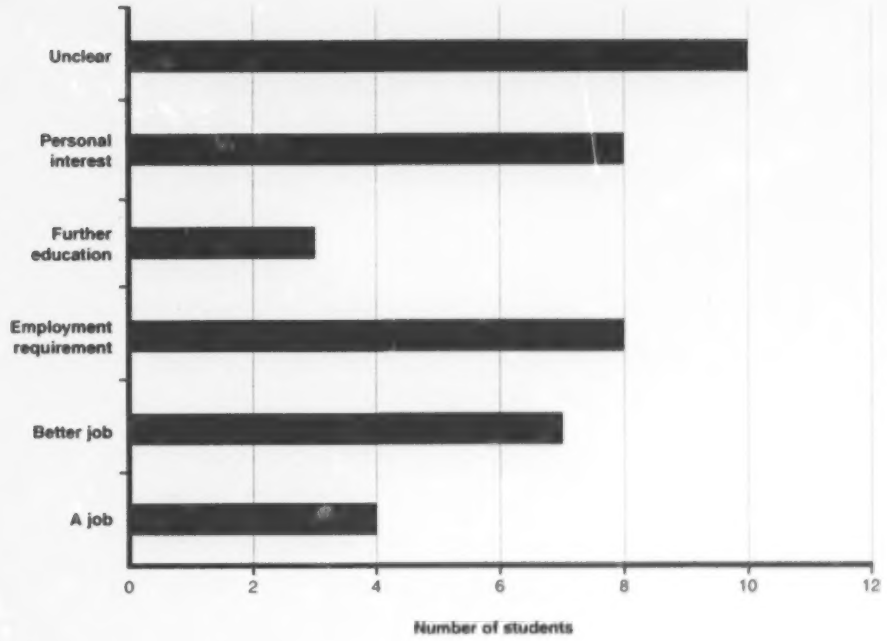

Table 4: Reasons for doing CAGE

Work History

Twelve of the older participants had worked in permanent jobs such as market gardeners, kitchenhands and waiters, one had worked as an electrician and another as a nurse. However, the majority of the participants (17) had worked in a variety of part-time or casual jobs such as take-away shop assistants, supermarket cashiers, and labouring jobs. Eleven students (27.5%) had never worked (see Table 5), and not surprisingly the majority of these were aged under 18.

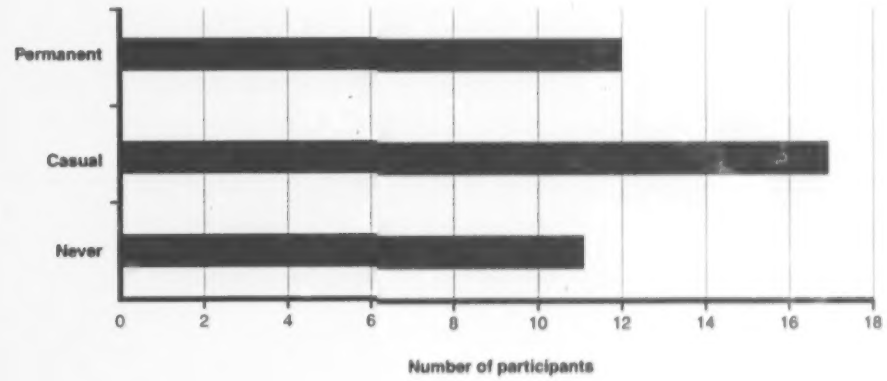

Table 5: Work History

Institute Personnel

The CAGE, Newstart and CAGE Bridging teachers and tutors and other personnel associated with the delivery of the course, such as the Administration officer and the Learning Support Team, provided the anecdotal evidence which supported much of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the students. Of the five CAGE teachers two also teach on Newstart, and four had taught on the CAGE Bridging course, so they were very familiar with both the students' special needs and the conduct of the courses involved. The Learning Support tutor who conducts all the CAGE interviews also teaches on Newstart.

Findings and discussion

Although the project originally set out to establish the effectiveness of the CAGE Bridging course in preparing students to study by flexible delivery in CAGE, it soon became apparent that students who had undertaken the Newstart Program had benefited from their course and were in fact demonstrating more self-directedness toward their learning than the CAGE Bridging students. As a result of these preliminary findings the study then proceeded to evaluate the effectiveness of both courses in preparing students for CAGE, and compared and contrasted them against students who had undertaken no previous literacy courses. The anecdotal comments from the Institute personnel were used to support the conclusions reached.

The 28 students who participated in the interviews and questionnaires were:

New Students:	15
Continuing Students:	13
Newstart Students:	8
CAGE Bridging Students:	6
Students studying off-site:	9
Students studying on-site:	19

Many of the areas examined overlapped but for the purposes of this study they were analysed into four broad categories: the students' perceptions of flexible delivery; their skill readiness; their dispositional skills; and their final course outcomes.

1. Perceptions of Flexible Delivery

- **What does flexible delivery mean to you?**

The students were asked to define what flexible delivery means to them, and 77% defined it as *working at your own pace, where and when you like*. Two mothers related this approach to learning to their personal situations where they can juggle their studies around their children. Significantly, only the CAGE

Bridging students related flexible delivery to the teacher being replaced by the module, and one added that it means being able to:

> *Ask for assistance when needed.*

The off-site students tended to relate flexible delivery to being able to study at home and studying as circumstances permit.

- **Do you like to learn this way?**

While the majority of the students said they like to learn this way (see Table 6), only 50% said they find studying this way helpful.

> *I do like it but I really need a kick up the but (sic) at times that I would get if I was at school.*

This echoes what teachers have observed,

> *... students like the freedom the course offers, but lack the autonomous learning skills to take advantage of it.*

> *[Some students] haven't the maturity to handle the pressure of the course, or the discipline to work at it. They just want to do it quickly without any effort, just to get it over and done with.*

Warner, Christie and Choy (1998) state that clients prefer traditional approaches to learning, but maybe these clients are not sufficiently aware of their own learning needs to be able to identify the type of learning which would benefit them.

Like Flexible Delivery		% of Students
Not at all	1	0%
	2	6%
	3	59%
	4	24%
Very Much	5	12%

Table 6: Degrees of liking flexible delivery

2. Skills readiness

The skills readiness category refers to those skills the students are bringing to the course, and those they use when studying by flexible delivery. These include their study skills and technological skills.

- **Study skills**

The students were asked to allocate their use of the most common supplementary physical learning resources, and these results give some cause for concern (see Table 7). The majority never use extra resources to help with their studies, and less than one quarter of the students use the Internet although it is freely available for use by on-site students and they are all orientated to how to use it at the beginning of the course. This resistance to technology was also revealed in Warner et al's 1998 study and course providers need to address this issue if students are to benefit from learning in the new age.

Supplementary Physical Resources	usage			
	never	seldom	often	always
Dictionary		37%	47%	15%
The Internet	37%	37%	21%	1%
Library Books		53%	47%	
Videos	58%	26%	16%	
Television	42%	42%	16%	
Newspapers	21%	53%	26%	

Table 7: Supplementary Physical Resources Used

This information could be interpreted in three ways:

- the modules are so designed that students don't need to use any extra information;
- students are orientated toward doing the minimal amount of work necessary to get an end result; or
- the students prefer others to plan and direct their learning because they lack the motivation to direct their own learning. (Bonham, 1991)

Teachers dispute the fact that the modules are completely self-contained and state that the students' lack of study skills is one reason why they fail to do well in the course.

> *... they want to do it quickly without any effort, just to get it over and done with. (They have) no motivation to actually understand the material – only want to get the piece of paper at the end.*

> *Initially motivation to 'get the course done' as quickly as possible results in students rushing through some modules in an attempt to move onto the next one.*

There were no significant differences in the study skills exhibited by any of the students.

- **Work style**

Nearly half the students said they start work on a new module by first skimming through the module to see what needs to be done. Only one Newstart student said he would then ask the teacher what needs to be done, while the others said they would either find out which resources they need to complete the module or start reading from the first Topic page. This supports what the teachers have said about students not seeking support but preferring to 'go it alone' which is not often very successful at this level of education.

3. Dispositional Readiness

Dispositional readiness refers to the personal characteristics of the learner such as motivation and prior learning experiences (Warner, Christie & Choy, 1998). Adult learners bring to learning situations experience as well as habits and biases which may affect their ability to adapt to new and different learning situations, and they may need either direction and/or support if they lack background knowledge or confidence. The self-directed learner will assume an increasing responsibility for the learning if they have identified specific goals.

This study examined these students' dispositional readiness through assessing their ability to identify their own learning needs by seeking assistance, managing their study time, articulating realistic goals and being able to evaluate them, and the assertiveness they demonstrate.

- **Prior educational experiences**

Clients undertaking CAGE mostly have low levels of formal education (see Table 2), and a wide variety of prior schooling experiences, some of which may directly affect their attitude toward further learning. Some of the reasons they gave for leaving school were:

> *When I was at school there was no remedial help and that made my life hell. You were either in the top class or the remedial class. My learning problems were not diagnosed... no one was interested. A deputy head told my mother 'you just have to accept (...) is below average intelligence'. It's taken me to age 28 to get my confidence back.*
>
> *I despised it.*
>
> *I didn't like the teachers' attitudes.*
>
> *I felt singled out by the teachers.*

For the purposes of this study the reasons the students gave for leaving school were analysed into three broad categories and some students cited more than one reason. The reasons were:

Peer and teacher problems/didn't like it	60%
Inappropriate subject content	24%
Personal reasons such as needing to work, illness, moving and family problems	32%

This result differs greatly from the ACER study which reports, "More than 50% of the students who left school early say the main reason they left was to find a job or apprenticeship. A further 13 % said they left because they did not like school" (1999, p. 5). Only one CAGE student said he left school early to support himself and none of the students reported that they had performed well at school. This supports the ACER study which concluded, "Students who perform well at school are far less likely to leave school early" (p.5).

- **Seeking assistance**

Being able to identify your own learning needs and ask for assistance is essential for successful study by flexible delivery. More than half the students surveyed had neither telephoned their teacher nor made a time to talk with their teachers out of class time about subject related matters. Teachers commented that only some of the students ask for assistance or feedback, and that the majority:

> *... seem to prefer to go it alone and often waste considerable amounts of time going off on the wrong track.*

Newstart students were more confident about seeking assistance and one summarised his learning experience in CAGE as:

> *What's working for me is being able to ask questions, saying I don't understand it. What's not working for me is organisation skills, not having enough access to the teachers of that subject, and having a positive attitude.*

Teachers also reported that off-site students almost never contact them and it is up to the teacher to maintain the telephone contact.

Twelve students undertook extra tuition through Learning Support, but only seven of these sought this out for themselves. The others were recommended by their subject teachers, and they were equally Newstart and CAGE Bridging students. Only two students who had undertaken no previous literacy courses accessed Learning Support. The Learning Support tutor said:

> *The majority of students only come during a 'crisis' such as at the end of the course, or for help with an assignment that requires resubmission. Once the crisis is resolved we don't see them again until the next crisis.*

One student, who described her return to study in the CAGE Bridging as *exciting* and who was extremely motivated in the course, chose to go only to Learning Support rather than the class sessions. It seems she prefers the face-to-face teacher direction she receives there. Another student who was identified as in need and referred to Learning Support was evaluated as:

> *(...) seems disorganised and unsure of his commitment... relied on tutor to give input and didn't get engaged in the task. Was looking for the answers to be supplied...*

This student had completed CAGE Bridging, and from all reports was very motivated throughout the course, but participated in very little of the CAGE course work although his attendance at class tutorials was exemplary during the first half of the semester. During follow-up contact he maintained he wanted to continue his studies but he failed to submit any work at all nor did he attend class tutorials.

- Time management

Time management includes being able to meet the course deadlines and manage one's own time (Misko, 1995). The Orientation and Study Skills module, a pre-requisite to study in CAGE, asks the students to make a timetable of how they intend to spend their time for the semester and this is evaluated and discussed with individual students to ensure they understand the value of allocating not only study time but also social and home life time. Seventy-eight percent of the students said they maintain a timetable during the course, but only 4% said they stick to it. One teacher commented:

> *Timetabling appears to be a consideration also. It is very easy to underestimate the time and organisation needed to succeed in this type of course. With reference to the 'type' of student involved, the ability to devote a specific number of hours per week to study, particularly when there are children to tend to, cows to milk is not an easy task. Whether it is a lack of successful study skills, preparation, writing skills, goal setting or simply time management I don't know.*

In the questionnaire students were asked if they had studied during the holiday break, last weekend, and last night, to establish who studies out of class time. This was relevant only to the on-site students attending tutorial sessions, and the majority said they did study out of scheduled sessions.

When asked if 'they like to get things done today and not put them off until tomorrow', only 56% of the students said 'yes'. At the beginning of each semester an 'assignment deadline' timetable is given to all students so that they may be able to keep track of the amount of time they should be spending on

each module if they want to complete the course within the semester. Only three Newstart students and one 'Other courses' student have kept to these deadlines.

- ## Goal Setting and Motivation

All of the students who completed the questionnaire stated they had 'a definite reason for doing CAGE'. However, when they were asked to articulate their reasons they were often less clear (see Table 4). Asked to rate their enthusiasm for doing CAGE on a scale of 1 to 5, only the students who had articulated clear goals rated their enthusiasm as a 'great extent', which is not surprising. The remaining 36% said they had only 'some' enthusiasm for doing the course, and all of these students were aged under 20 and, except for one, had never worked. There seems to some correlation between the ability to be able articulate a clear goal and the age of the learners (see Table 8 below).

Goals	Age in years														
	15	16	17	18	19	20	22	25	27	28	29	31	33	39	41
A job			1		1			1							
Better job					1		1				1				
Employment requirement				1		1	1		1						
Further education		1	1						1						
Personal interest							1			1		1	2	1	1
Unclear	1	3	2		1	1									

Table 8: Age relative to Goals

The self-directed learner will assume an increasing responsibility for the learning if they have identified specific goals (Bittel, 1989, p. 15). Bittel says self-directed learning is purposeful activity directed toward a specific goal, the goal being something that the learner currently lacks. He defines motivation as 'the starter button' which "energises the learner and directs activity toward the accomplishment of (that) goal", and believes this is influenced by internal and external variables which form the individual's life space (1989, p.77). Misko (1995) agrees that motivation is "critical to effective performance in any venture" and adds that unless the individual is strongly motivated, they "may not be interested in searching for strategies that have been successful in the past and implementing these to the new task" (p.16). If the younger learners do not have a clear reason for doing CAGE they are less likely to be self-directed enough to able to apply themselves to the study required to succeed.

One teacher summarised the students who do fail to do well in her subject as those who lack motivation and are not:

> *...prepared to get extra tutoring to build up their skills level and rarely ask for help in class time.*

However, closely related to motivation is confidence in one's ability to be able to do the work. Misko (1995, p 16) believes that lack of transfer may not always be the result of lack knowledge or skills but may sometimes be because of the student's lack of faith in his or her own abilities. Two successful students a CAGE teacher had also taught in Newstart were described as:

> *...both began with extremely negative attitudes in Newstart, needed to build up confidence, break through Maths phobias as well as build up skill levels. Both put in lots of time and effort and now in CAGE have thrived in confidence levels and are doing well. [They are] prepared to work in holiday time and ask lots of questions to clarify concepts they are unsure of...*

- ## Assertiveness

The students were asked about distractions they experienced to their study in order to gain some idea about their ability to be assertive and resolve conflicts which affect their studies. Three of the mothers in the course mentioned children's needs as their biggest distraction to their study time, and five of the younger students cited their boyfriend/girlfriend or friends in general. Students who work full-time complained about 'staying awake' and being distracted by 'anything'. In contrast most of the students who study on-site complained about the "*other students talking about things not related to the study*", although all the teachers observed that none of the students do anything about asserting that this is their study time, nor do they move to a quieter location.

On-site students attend timetabled sessions where the subject teacher is available to provide individual support and tuition as needed. These are held in large classrooms where tables can be arranged in small or large study groups but the students may go to other areas in the college to access materials they need. One teacher classified her CAGE class into groups where Group A is the dominant males, Group B the mature aged students, Group C the girls and Group D the library escapees. These 'library escapees', she said, come in sign on and disappear for the rest of the session. They have also failed to complete much work of a satisfactory standard.

Group B the mature aged students consists of mostly Newstart students and only one older CAGE Bridging student, while the 'library escapees' are aged under 18 and are mostly CAGE Bridging students or students who have undertaken no previous courses.

4. Final Course Outcomes

The final course outcomes are evaluated by participation in the course work and satisfactory completion of modules and assignments.

Fourteen students (50% of the participants surveyed) were evaluated by the teachers as having participated in the course satisfactorily. But similarly 42.9% had unsatisfactory participation and two (5%) of the students enrolled dropped out. One the students dropped out after unsatisfactory participation, another dropped out after satisfactory participation.

As indicated in Table 9, five of the eight Newstart students participated in the course satisfactorily, and three students' participation was evaluated as unsatisfactory by their teachers. Only one Newstart student dropped out, after satisfactory participation, for personal reasons. One student completed all the course outcomes in this semester, and another two students who undertook Newstart last year have now completed the course after part-time studies over the past two semesters.

Of the six CAGE Bridging students three participated unsatisfactorily, only two participated satisfactorily and one dropped out. None completed all the course requirements, although one is almost finished.

Students who had undertaken other courses prior to doing CAGE had a much better participation rate, while those who had undertaken no previous courses had a higher unsatisfactory participation. Many of these were off-site students, aged less than 20. Only one off-site student (aged 25) has completed her studies in CAGE after part-time studies over two semesters and another two (older) off-site students were recorded as having participated in their studies satisfactorily.

Final status	CAGE bridging	Newstart	No previous courses	Other courses
Satisfactory Participation		1	1	3
Unsatisfactory Participation	4	3		
Dropped Out	4	3	2	2

Table 9: The final status of the students surveyed

Significantly students aged 18 and under demonstrated little participation in course work (see Table 10), with only one from this age group consistently handing in work for assessment and completing course outcomes. This student had completed a diploma course in tourism and hospitality prior to undertaking CAGE and has been employed in part-time jobs all the time since leaving school. She has identified clear goals for her future and intends to study Adult Tertiary Preparation next year.

Goals	Age in years														
	15	16	17	18	19	20	22	25	27	28	29	31	33	36	39	41
Satisfactory progress			1		1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	2			1
Unsatisfactory progress	1	4	2	1	2		1							1		
Dropped Out			1			1										

Table 10: Age relative to the final status of students surveyed

Summary

Given the information in Table 10 it is possible to conclude that students who have recently left the school system do not do well in a flexibly delivered course such as CAGE. Smith et al (1997, p. 95) state that in flexible delivery students need to "motivate themselves, which could be an insuperable challenge for some students, particularly school-leavers or the long-term unemployed; [and they] need to be assertive in seeking assistance when working through self-paced materials". Misko (1994) supports this, and adds that taking responsibility for one's learning will be easier for those students who are motivated. She further concludes that problems "may be felt by those who are not motivated and do not have the assertiveness skills and confidence to question instructors or to go to teachers for help" (p.40).

Teachers involved in Newstart, CAGE Bridging and CAGE believe the CAGE Bridging course was not long enough.

> *The main areas to look at for success rate are maturity, skill level, confidence in themselves and ability to ask questions/relate to other students and teacher/tutor, and motivation. Most of our clients struggle with personal problems/issues, which often hinder their progress. In Newstart we begin to sort through these so that the students are more ready to cope with studying issues... in my opinion CAGE Bridging was not long enough.*

The only student to complete the Certificate in Adult General Education in one semester summed up Newstart as:

> *Newstart increased my confidence. It filled in the gaps and it was great to realize I wasn't the only adult having problems. Without it I would have been like a beached whale in CAGE.*

A CAGE Bridging student said:

> *CAGE Bridging was a huge help and I wouldn't have got as far as I have without it. In CAGE we need more teacher time. A one on one teacher/student relationship helps you to get through the course.*

The findings from this study suggest that to prepare students to study by flexible delivery in CAGE a number of factors need to be addressed:

- the motivation of the clients for wanting to do this course should be established during the pre-course screening;
- the students need to be assertive about their learning needs and this should be developed through conflict resolution and team building exercises in the preparatory course so that they may be able to transfer these skills into other learning situations;
- the students need support throughout their learning process; and
- the preparatory course needs to be longer than the previous Bridging course with a stronger focus on dispositional skills as well as technological and study skills.

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings from this study have consequences for all providers of CAGE. According to ANTA (1997) flexible delivery is here to stay and, while the majority of learners in CAGE say they like to study this way, this study demonstrates they lack the self-directedness to take advantage of it. Flexible delivery should not disempower the very students it is meant to empower through flexibility of study location, choice of learning style and removal of pressure to compete with more advanced students. As adults these students have recognised that they want to change their educational status and we should be providing them with the tools and support to do so.

The skills relevant to self-directed learning need to be taught (Warner, Christie & Choy, 1998, p.59), and this study into the effectiveness of a preparatory course which aimed to prepare students for study by flexible delivery shows the course did not go far enough. In fact the students who had undertaken the longer Newstart course with its focus on personal, interpersonal and communication skills were in fact better prepared for self-directed learning.

There has been a general conception that age is an important contributing factor in relation to how readily learners adapt to self-directed learning. Certainly the younger students in general struggle with learning by flexible delivery and are more likely to drop out than their older colleagues, but this is not always the case. In this course, as in previous courses, there has been at least one student aged under 18 who has successfully completed the course outcomes. Unless an individual is strongly motivated and can clearly articulate his/her goals there seems little chance of success in this type of course. Effective learning occurs

when students are motivated, confident and in control of their learning. Definitely students of all ages who have had some experience working are more self-directed, and they are able to more clearly identify their reasons for wanting their Year 10 certificate.

Flexible delivery represents a culture shift where face-to-face lock step teaching methods are giving way to independent self-paced study, and students need to organise their own time and be more responsible for their own learning, but low literacy learners especially cannot be assumed to know how to do this. To help them make the transition we need effective pre-course screening and preparatory courses which address the issue of self-directedness, and students need effective support and assistance throughout their studies.

As a result of these findings the following recommendations are made:

Pre-course screening

CAGE applicants should be required to make an appointment for an interview and an assessment of their literacy and numeracy skills. While the present interview focuses on establishing some rapport with the potential learner, and gaining some idea of their interests and needs, an evaluation of the learner's self-directedness is glossed over and this needs to be addressed through a comprehensive questionnaire which establishes their weaknesses and strengths in this area.

The commercially available Learning Preference Assessment questionnaire (Guglielmino, 1991) claims to measure the dimension of student readiness for self-directed study using scores which can readily be read on a scale, but the learners who undertake CAGE have low levels of reading comprehension and it is recommended that a more simple version of learning preference is developed which uses Plain English and which considers what students need to be able to complete CAGE successfully.

A preparatory course

From the data collected from this one case study it is evident that a preparatory course which specifically targets the learning skills necessary for flexible delivery is required. The CAGE Bridging needs to be at least 400 hours, and it needs to include interpersonal and communication skills which focus on developing an increased confidence in learning ability, assertiveness, conflict resolution and team building. Students need to learn to relate to the teacher as a facilitator in their learning, and have the confidence to seek support during their learning.

As well as building up the learners' literacy and numeracy skills, the Bridging course needs to include a very strong focus on interpersonal and communication skills. The learners' dispositional knowledge should be developed within the generic skills which include the key competencies:

- collecting and analysing information
- communicating ideas and information
- planning and organising activities

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- working with others and in teams
- using Maths ideas and techniques
- solving problems, and
- using technology. (Mayer Report, 1992)

Support during CAGE

It is evident that the on-site students have more opportunity for support throughout their studies in CAGE, and this may be one reason why off-site students fail to do well. Off-site students are entitled to the same amount of support and assistance that on-site students receive and there needs to be some process established so that they receive it. Their low levels of literacy and lack of access to computer technology prevents interactive computer programs being used with all of the students but videoconferencing may prevent some of the isolation they feel and this needs to be considered in future programs.

Due to their distant locations, or because they are in full-time employment, it will always remain difficult for off-site to undertake a CAGE preparatory course but a system where they have ready access to a mentor or tutor during their studies in CAGE would provide them with more support.

All of these recommendations have pedagogical implications for program development and delivery, resource development and personnel deployment, as well as funding implications.

The implementation of these recommendations that arise out of the findings from this investigation will allow these learners to reconstruct their social and economic reality, and ensure an accessible and equitable educational program is available to them.

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Appendix I

The Student Interview Proforma

Student ID:

Age:

Status: **On-site/Off-site/New/Continuing**

Previous Education (schooling/other courses)

What? When? Where?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Educational experiences

Did you like school? Other courses done?

_____

_____

Why did you leave?

_____

_____

_____

Describe your relationship with the teachers/other students

_____

_____

_____

Attendance

_____

Free time

Work History

Reasons for doing CAGE

To what extent did you want to do CAGE?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	a little	to some extent	a great extent

Did you feel CAGE Bridging/Newstart prepared you for CAGE?

1	2	3	4
Not at all	a little	to some extent	a great extent

How? Why not?

Expectations of CAGE

Did you think it would be more difficult/easier?

Sufficient information prior to starting?

Confidence?

Pressures?

Difficulties with CAGE

The subjects?

The workload?

Do you find learning by flexible delivery helpful?

Access to teachers?

Resources?

Support/encouragement?

Attitude to study

Do you think you spend the time in sessions/at study effectively?

What are the distractions?

How much time out of class sessions do you spend studying?

Tutorial Support? Volunteer Tutor? Help at home?

Are you able to negotiate your studies with your teachers?

What is working/not working for you?

How do you think you're going?

Appendix II

The Student Questionnaire

Now that you have been studying in CAGE for at least 10 weeks I would like you to answer some questions about what you feel about flexible delivery, how you prefer to study, and your plans.

There is of course no right or wrong answer to these questions. I just want your honest opinion.

Student ID:

1. What does flexible delivery mean to you?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Do you like to learn this way?

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Very much

3. When you start a new module do (number 3 only to show the order in which you work)

a. look at how many hours it should take to complete ☐

b. find out which resources you need to complete the module ☐

c. skim through the whole module to see what it's about ☐

d. ask another student about it ☐

e. ask the teacher about it ☐

f. look at the assignment for the module ☐

g. start reading from the first page ☐

h. start reading from the Topic page ☐

i. start with the activities and only go back to the explanation if you have a problem ☐

j. start with the assignment and only go back to the module if you have problems ☐

k. other ☐

4. Have you telephoned your teacher/s to ask about work?

   YES NO

5. Have you made an appointment to go through work with your teacher out of timetabled class sessions?

   YES NO

6. When you are working through the module, and doing the assignment do you use

   a dictionary; **never** **seldom** **often** **always**

   the Internet; **never** **seldom** **often** **always**

   library books (other than the ones you have to use in the module);
   never **seldom** **often** **always**

   videos; **never** **seldom** **often** **always**

   information you have heard on television;
   never **seldom** **often** **always**

   newspapers; **never** **seldom** **often** **always**

   other; **never** **seldom** **often** **always**

7. Which describes the way you like to learn?
   (number 1,2,3 to put in order your first three preferences)

   a. read an explanation in the module and then practise it in the activity ☐

   b. read an explanation in the module and then talk to another student about it ☐

c. read an explanation in a module and then talk to your teacher about it ☐

d. have the teacher explain it to you the practice it ☐

e. read and highlight the important facts ☐

f. read and make notes ☐

g. read and write down the important points that are relevant only to the activity, or assignment question ☐

h. look at what someone else has done ☐

i. find out information fro yourself ☐

j. write drafts and get the teacher to check it before you write it in the module or assignment ☐

k. other ☐

8. Have you made a timetable for study week? YES NO

If yes, do you change it? YES NO

Do you stick to it? YES NO

9. Did you study during the holidays? YES NO

Last weekend? YES NO

Last night? YES NO

10. Describe yourself:

I have a definite reason for doing CAGE YES NO

I like to get things done today and not put them off until tomorrow YES NO

I finish what I start YES NO

11. What are your goals?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. What is the biggest distraction when you are studying?

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. Do you think you will finish your goals in the course this semester? (BE HONEST!!)

No Doubtful Most probably Yes, definitely

Thank you for completing this questionnaire

5 Small action research project on ESL literacy and pre-linguistic African women refugees

Jenny Trevino and Jennifer Davids

Introduction

The main purpose of our research has been to explore the English language needs and special circumstances of NESB women who are pre-literate, or with limited formal education in L 1. We particularly wanted to concentrate on women from the Horn of Africa as the most recent example of the above group. It seemed to the researchers that the AMEP was failing to meet the ESL needs of these women, that is, they were leaving the program or completing the 510 hours without achieving functional English, or some were not accessing the program at all. Although our teaching experience gave us some insight into the learners' circumstances, we felt we could gain a great deal more by consulting the representatives from community groups who are supporting the women and their families, and through these groups, achieve more direct and informal communication with the women themselves. We also wished to expand our understanding by reading current published and unpublished materials relevant to the concerns of the target groups. Our aim is to make informed recommendations regarding the most effective and appropriate way of delivering ESL literacy programs, with particular reference to classroom setting, teaching approaches and methodology, and overcoming limitations.

Curriculum and pedagogy

Sociocultural studies such as those quoted by Hood (1990) point out that the function of language differs from the home environment to the formal school environment, in that the context reduced language of the classroom is more abstract and cognitively demanding than context embedded, more concrete language of domestic settings. According to Hood:

> *A lack of proficiency in L1 context-reduced functions is likely to impact on the development of L2 context-reduced proficiency.* (p.56)

It is obvious then that non-literate adult second language learners are severely challenged in a formal classroom, particularly if their L2 oral development is still in the very early stages, and this high cognitive demand impacts not only L2 literacy acquisition, but on L2 oracy acquisition. Learners can acquire spoken proficiency more quickly in informal situations than formal settings (Weinstein, 1984; and others cited by Hood, 1990).

For beginner learners of English pre-literate in L1, Hood recommends a very gradual movement from the concrete and familiar to the more abstract and decontextualised, particularly in oral interaction. In addition, she recommends an approach which combines the oral and written modes in constant movement back and forwards along a continuum of discussion, oral recount, and towards a more decontextualised written account.

It seemed to the teachers/researchers and other community participants that the primary target group for this project (pre-literate women from the Horn of Africa) are particularly successful language learners, most of them being at least bilingual before acquiring English, and that the content reduced language of the formal classroom actually inhibits the development of English proficiency.

Language teachers of the late 1990's can feel that they are inhabiting a contradictory pedagogical landscape as they try to juggle theories ranging from humanistic approaches like Freire's critique of the traditional 'banking' methodology in the 70's to the communicative approach of the late 80's, the 'learner-centred curriculum' of the early 90's and now 'competency-based' language teaching which has developed from a climate of economic rationalism and an attempt to link ESL to vocational training agendas. According to Sanguinetti (1992)

> *Teachers, especially adult education teachers, are apprehensive about the prospect of rigid curricula, competitiveness and the negation of cultural values implied by the discourse of training and competencies.* (p. 13)

By 1996 a national competency-based curriculum, the Curriculum of Spoken and Written English (CSWE), was implemented in Queensland, and ESL Literacy teachers within the AMEP, like Marion Horton at Southbank TAFE, were required by funding strictures to document learners' progress within a curriculum framework which essentially pre-supposes L1 literacy. Marian Horton responded by taking an action research approach to her teaching and developed a Multiple Literacies Module (MLM), a set of precursive CSWE 1 developmental competencies for Band A and pre-literate learners (Horton and Horton, 1999). Horton's work also recognises that traditional course duration and rigid adherence to curriculum do not allow the learners enough time and scope to develop the oracy skills necessary for beginning literacy in English. Her documentation of learners' progress shows that given enough time and flexibility, real gains can be made even within the confines of a formal classroom.

Horton also used voluntary tutors and the classroom support of co-teachers to enable a more effective experimental approach to language learning. Some teacher/practitioners such as Foster and Rado (1992) see such support as even more important if it is bilingual:

> *Using the ethnic language as a support ... has a role in migrant Women's English literacy classes. Members of adult literacy classes often have a low self-concept, are anxious and feel insecure. Using their first language*

> *to share their concerns and ask questions in a supportive and familiar language environment gives them the relief and enables them to concentrate on the learning task.* (p.27)

It is important to note here that many of the community participants in this project voiced their beliefs that bilingual tutorial support would benefit the learners, though there was an understanding that such support is hard to find.

Jill Sanguinetti's (1992) reflections on 'empowering' ESL methodologies through her experiences teaching at a Migrant Women's Learning Centre (MWLC) are inspiring. She distrusts methodologies of empowerment that remain essentially teacher-centred, or are only social, or only individual. She writes:

> *At the MWLC, the kind of empowerment that I believe is taking place is both social and individual. Students become empowered by learning English and also by reconstructing their worlds within empathic relationships, in a context of group building, experience sharing, questioning and connecting.* (p. 19)

During the course of our conversations with community group members it was commented that whilst our western/European society fosters the value of individual independence, African society, particularly women, value interdependence. As teachers, health professionals or social workers we can often be at cross-purposes with our clients unless we too take a listening/learning role.

Sanguinetti finally espouses pedagogy, which is not merely an 'anything goes' approach but an on-going process of critical self-reflection and dialectical movement between educational theory and classroom practise, allowing both teacher and students to respond authentically to the moment and the context.

The consultation process

Over several weeks we met individually with representatives from the following groups:

- Red Cross
- The African Australian Association of Queensland
- The Multicultural Development Association
- Anglican Refugee & Migrant Ministry
- Catholic Pastoral Care
- Queensland Program for the Assistance to the Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASST)
- Migrant Employment Assistance Project.

We also continued an on-going process of consultation with AMEP teaching colleagues within our institution and the TAFE Language Service. We finally invited representatives from all of the above groups and any other interested individuals to a combined meeting with a view to sharing insights and

experiences, establishing a network to support the aims of this project, highlighting and exploring the particular ESL needs of the target group, and making recommendations for the provision of classes. All those involved in the consultation process believe that English language skills are essential for the successful resettlement of refugees and migrants, and that there is a significant minority of women who, because of limited formal education in L1 and limited literacy skills in both L1 and English, have 'fallen through the net'. These women are in need of specifically designed literacy and numeracy programs.

The major issues raised and explored in these meetings are outlined below, and constitute recommendations agreed upon by the teacher/researchers, community representatives and some of the women themselves.

1. Venue

Many pre-literate adult refugees are reluctant to attend English language classes in a formal educational setting such as a TAFE institution. They can feel shame and exposure in front of fellow students, or anxiety about meeting the expectations of a generally unfamiliar setting. Apart from this, the predominant use of worksheets, whiteboard and written texts in most mainstream ESL institutions excludes the pre-literate learner, and large class sizes mean that the teacher has very limited time to cater to those with special needs. Consequently, such shame or anxiety can be compounded by a slower development in English language skills than their L1-literate fellow students.

As a result, it was felt that an informal community setting would be non-threatening and more appropriate for these learners.

2. Class size

As noted above, large class size limits successful outcomes for those learners with special needs. In order to develop language and literacy skills in an environment that fosters openness, intimacy and trust.

A maximum group size of eight to ten students was recommended.

3. Course duration

Most AMEP and other ESL courses are short and intense (e.g. 15 hrs x 10 weeks). Courses of this nature were seen to be inappropriate for the pre-literate adult learner for a number of reasons:

- as development of literacy skills is occurring through L2, a reasonable level of L2 oracy must be developing concurrently;
- short courses do not allow enough time span for the challenging conceptual demands of becoming literate, not only as an adult, but also through the medium of a new language;
- For women of backgrounds very different to the dominant Australian culture (e.g. rural Africa), a longer period for successful socialisation and acculturation is necessary;

- Many of these women have large families and their responsibilities make them unwilling or unable to invest several hours a day in formal language learning.

In consideration of these factors, participants in the consultation process believed that a three hour class once a week for 12 months would be appropriate for these learners.

4. Gender

Community consultants confirmed the teacher/researchers perception that the number of women from the Horn of Africa in need of ESL literacy tuition was greater than the number of men. Apart from the greater number, everyone we spoke to felt that women would benefit from an all female class group so that issues of health, the law, and family concerns could be discussed freely. However, participants believed that there was no reason why non-African women could not access a literacy group, and that there would be significant cultural, social and interpersonal gains from the interaction.

It was recommended that the target group would benefit from an all-female ESL literacy group that was multi-cultural in its make-up.

5. Teaching approach/content

A formal Competency Based Training approach such as is utilised by the AMEP through the Certificate of Spoken and Written English (CSWE) curriculum was considered to be largely inappropriate for this learner group. It was generally suggested that the teaching approach should be informal and relaxed to foster openness and trust between teacher/students, students/students. Most community group representatives reported that they are on 'a steep learning curve' in regard to developing greater insight into the cultural and linguistic backgrounds and resettlement health and educational requirements of families from the Horn of Africa. All learning is ideally then an active two-way process. Women we spoke to reported that they particularly felt excluded from their children's educational process due to lack of English language and literacy skills, and that this contributed to their disempowerment within the family, as fathers were seen to be capable where mothers were not. Health professionals from the Mater Hospital expressed their willingness to participate in a women's literacy program as guest speakers. An understanding of women's rights and responsibilities under the law was also seen to be an important aspect. It was strongly suggested by a number of people that the sharing and learning of practical and artistic skills, as an adjunct to more 'serious' language learning, would provide the group with shared experiences which would generate further language/literacy development. Others suggested that an inclusion of music and dance into the curriculum would ensure light-heartedness and joy in the learning process.

In general, it was recommended by community/participants and potential ESL literacy students that the teaching/learning approach should be relaxed and

informal, foster trust, and be learner-centred, and that the content should include language in context which answers to the immediate settlement needs and an on-going socialisation process of the target group.

6. Childcare

Everybody agreed that childcare was the greatest challenge as lack of appropriate, affordable childcare prohibits women from accessing a language/literacy class. The AMEP provides free childcare for the duration of its 510 hours, but for post-AMEP clients and for those whose language learning preference is a community setting, childcare is prohibitively expensive. Nevertheless, community participants came up with some creative possible solutions to the problem, including:

- asking the Playgroup Association to assist the women in setting up a playgroup with their children. All women participate in initial sessions and then take turns in caring for the children;
- employing voluntary students from Childcare Certificate and Diploma courses at various educational institutions to do their placement with this group of children;
- employ community volunteers;
- continue to lobby government groups and representatives to provide free childcare to NESB families in need of language, literacy and numeracy training.

7. Transport

It was a matter of much debate that some women due to their religious and gender based beliefs were reluctant to access public transport and that this was an additional hurdle to their attendance at a class, either within the TAFE college or community setting. The community groups that were consulted were unable to recommend any resolution, given the current funding restrictions, which would make the provision of private transport financially viable.

We are unable to make any recommendations regarding this issue.

Discussion

The teacher-researchers believe that a language experience approach should underpin the teaching strategies employed. The teacher need not focus on traumatic experiences of war or displacement (unless initiated by the student) but on childhood, familial, cultural or ceremonial experiences. Writing, reading and sharing such memories with their children and grandchildren who are growing in a western setting could help maintain the women's traditional centrality in the family. Many women we spoke to articulated their fear of loss of this status. Many women also feared exclusion from their children's 'school lives' and were concerned about a potentially growing impasse between them and their children generally, so a literacy class would also focus on 'school texts', for example,

newsletters, forms and homework sheets. Wherever possible authentic community texts should be used as resources.

Current research would affirm the community's recommendations that ESL literacy classes for women be held in an informal community setting with a negotiated curriculum which explores the learner's experiences and concerns. The classes should be conducted within a time frame that allows a more natural and gentle acquisition of both new language and new cultural skills. Moreover, given that very little research has been conducted with this particular special needs group, we believe that an on-going action research approach would benefit the ESL literacy learning community.

Recommendations

As a result of the research the teachers/researchers have recommended the following:

- the class he delivered to maximum group size of eight to ten students,
- A three hour class once a week for 12 months would he appropriate for these learners;
- the target group would benefit from an all-female ESL literacy group that is multi-cultural in its makeup;
- the teaching/learning approach should be relaxed and informal, foster trust, and be learner-centred, and that the course content should include language in context which answers to the immediate settlement needs and the ongoing socialisation process of the target group;
- in regard to childcare several suggestions have been made:
  - asking the Playgroup Association to assist the women in setting up a playgroup with their children. That all women participate in initial sessions and then take turns in caring for the children
  - employing voluntary students from Childcare Certificate and Diploma courses at various educational institutions to do their placement with this group of children
  - employ community volunteers
  - continue to lobby government groups and representatives to provide free childcare to NESB families in need of language, literacy and numeracy training.
- no recommendations have been made in regard to transport.

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